UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Library respects the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection. The Library holds the rights and permissions to put this material online. If you hold an active copyright to this work and would like to have your materials removed from the web please contact the USHMM Library by phone at 202-479-9717, or by email at digital_library@ushmm.org.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Inc.

https://archive.org/details/memoirs01mand

Lucy Mandelstam

MEMOIRS

My earliest memories are from the time my sister Evelyne was born. We lived together with my grandparents, and I was spoiled by all the family. Suddenly there was this little intruder, and the whole household revolved around her. What I resented most of all was the time my mother spent with her, I didn't realize till much later how sick Evy was, she was injured during a difficult birth, and her left shoulder remained partially paralyzed. She needed various treatments, and because my mother was always busy with her, my father took over and spent more time with me. For me it was the best thing that could have happened, I adored my father. He was exceptionally bright, he was interested in everything and had an amazing knowledge for someone who had to break off his education. He had always wanted to be a doctor, but when my mother, who was his first cousin, came for a visit from Czechoslovakia, they fell in love and she became pregnant. It was a big family scandal, my mother tried to commit suicide, but in the end they got married. My father had to give up medical school to support the family and became a chiropodist.

Because there was not enough money, they couldn't get a place of their own, but it must have been very hard for my mother. My grandmother was not easy to live with, she always thought that if not for my mother, my father would have become a doctor (he did in the end, but many years later.) For us children it was wonderful living together, my grandfather was a kind and loving man who never lost his temper and always had time for us. He was the one who kept the peace, when there was trouble between my mother and grandmother. There was often a tense atmosphere at home, but there was also a lot of love and affection, and I remember my childhood as very happy. Money was short most of the time, times were hard in Vienna, there was a lot of unemployment, and sometimes my father was out of work. I never felt deprived though, we didn't go hungry, we were always nicely dressed and we had everything we needed. My whole family were great readers and there were always books in the house, but the most important thing was music. All of us loved classical music, in particular opera, but living in Vienna in those days we knew all the operettas by heart. Today, when I hear the familiar melodies, I feel nostalgia and sadness at the same time, so many memories come back of a childhood that was cut short by circumstances.

Our family was quite large, my mother was one of seven children, her mother was one of eleven, so I had lots of aunts, uncles and cousins. Part of them lived in Vienna, part in Czechoslovakia. We went every year to my grandparents in Znaim, a lovely medieval town in the Sudeten, the German speaking part of Czechoslovakia. We usually stayed there for the whole summer, at my grandparents home with my aunts Else and Luise who were still single. Else was my favorite, she played the piano and guitar, and she loved to cook. Grete lived in Italy for many years, she was very beautiful, whenever she came to visit she brought me lovely presents. Martha lived with her husband

Albert and her twins Kitty and Kurt very close to my grandparents, and since we were close in age, we spent a lot of time together. I know very little about my mother's father Hermann, he was the brother of my Viennese grandmother Josephine. They had another brother who lived near us. My Viennese grandfather Emil had a few brothers and sisters, I only remember them vaguely, except for one brother and his family who we saw often. My grandmother Cecilie had a big family in Vienna, her father was still alive when I was a little girl, I remember visiting him. He would receive us in his big apartment, we had to be very quiet and on our best behavior, actually we were a little afraid of him, he was so formal and we were not used to that. He disapproved of my grandmother's marriage because my grandfather was poor, he was very well off and so were all his other children. One of his daughters, my great–aunt Rosa, was a teacher of languages and she taught me English. I went to her once a week, she lived in another part of town, I walked there all by myself and I was only nine or ten years old. I loved going to her, she was a lovely person and a very good teacher. I was looking forward to these lessons for another reason too, in her neighborhood there was a wonderful library for children, where I could browse and take out books.

My grandmother Cecilie was a very special person. She had a hard life, but she never complained. My grandfather Hermann never earned enough to support their seven children, her family had cut her off, so she went out with a horse and cart to markets where she put up a stand and sold materials. She got up at three in the morning and came home in the late afternoon, and although she must have been exhausted she always had time for everybody. She loved writing letters and little poems, I remember her sitting at the table writing, at the same time removing her hairpins until her long hair came tumbling down, eventually she put her head on her arms and fell asleep. We had a lot of fun in Znaim, it was a small town and we could roam around freely, we went swimming in the river or in the local pool, the four of us (Evy, Kitty, Kurt and me) had a great time.

In Vienna we lived in a nice neighborhood, right across from a beautiful park, the Augarten, were we spent most of our free time. I loved school, I even remember my first school days, I was terrified. I was very shy and any new place frightened me, but I was seated next to a girl who felt like me, and we soon became friends. Ilse was a very bright child, she was one of four children who lived with their mother in a one room apartment, they had no father and were really poor. Our school was a mixture of rich and poor, Gentiles and Jews, all lived in the same neighborhood and got on well together, my closest friends though were Jewish. My family was not religious, but we were very conscious of being Jews. Anti–Semitism was always present in Austria, although I personally never felt it in my childhood, Vienna was a wonderful place to grow up in, it was such a beautiful city with so many opportunities to

live a rich cultural life, I felt fortunate to be a part of it. My father took me for long walks and pointed out all the historical places, he loved telling me stories of Vienna's past.

After these walks we usually went to one of my father's favorite cafes. I remember these old world coffeehouses with their high ceiling, big chandeliers and newspapers on bamboo racks, they had a wonderful atmosphere. People came there to meet friends, play cards, read the papers, or just have a cup of coffee. One could sit there for hours over one cup and nobody objected. My special treat was a rich chocolate cake called Zigeuner (Gypsy) with heaps of whipped cream, and I felt very grown up sitting with my father's friends and listening to their conversation. I enjoyed every minute with my father.

In the winter of 1932 I became ill with Diphtheria. In those days there were no antibiotics, a serum was discovered which saved many lives, but it remained a very serious illness and quite a number of children died. I was taken to hospital and for the first time in my life I was alone and away from home. Thanks to the kind nurses who took care of me I soon settled in, which was very important, as I had to stay in hospital for two months. Complications had set in, I couldn't swallow and had to be fed through a tube, I was covered in bedsores and my weight had dropped considerably. Being skinny to begin with, there wasn't much left of me. I remember many things from that time, the big Christmas tree in the ward, two awful boys in my room who frightened me with ghost stories, the taste of lemon tea which was always kept next to my bed, but what stands out most vividly in my mind were my parents' visits. Since it was an isolation ward for contagious diseases, nobody was allowed in, and my poor parents had to stand outside in the bitter cold and look at me through ice encrusted windows. My parents had an exceptionally difficult time that winter, my little sister had Pneumonia, my father was out of work again and me being so ill, it must have been very traumatic for them. When I finally came home I was still very weak, and couldn't go to school, but my father kept me entertained. I remember this as a very happy time, we played cards and other games, listened to records, and he helped me with my schoolwork. I had missed three months, but when I went back to school I did quite well. I loved going to school and I was a good pupil, but I was very shy, and to stand up in class and answer a question the teacher had asked was agony for me. When I grew older it got easier, but it took me many years to completely overcome my shyness.

Each member of my family played a different role in my early years, later all that changed of course. My mother was busy with my sister, who was often sick, but she was a very warm and loving person. She was strict with me and much less indulgent than the rest of my family. My grandfather was the worst offender, he could never say no to us. He often took us to the Prater, an enormous amusement park which was close to where we lived, he bought us rides on carrousels, let us watch puppet theaters and buy all the sweets and

cotton candy we could eat. My grandmother did all the cooking, I loved watching her and I was happiest when she let me help her, and when she took me shopping to the market. She was a wonderful cook, she had a natural talent, often she had to do with very little, but we always ate well.

One activity everybody took part in, even my grandparents, was going on outings in the Vienna Woods. It was a hikers paradise, with small picturesque villages, mountains, valleys and forests. Early Sunday mornings we would take a train into the country and with rucksacks on our backs we set out. It was such a welcome change from the big city, to breathe in the fresh air and smell the flowers, it was beautiful. Sometimes it was a little scary to get deep into the woods, there was always a slight fear of getting lost (having read too many fairy tales like Hansel and Gretel), but most of the trails were marked. When the sun went down we would go to one of the many outdoor restaurants where you could have a picnic with your own food, as long as you ordered drinks. Every time we went to different places and we got to know the countryside pretty well.

There were so many things to enjoy, each season had something different to offer. In summer we went swimming in the Danube or in one of the many public pools, sometimes we went sailing, (a friend of the family had a sailboat), and of course best of all was spending two months in Znaim. Winters in Vienna were very cold, but it was beautiful when it started snowing, all the trees were covered in white and it became very still. When the snow was firm enough, my father pulled us with a sled to the Hauptallee, which was a large park with special places for children to play. There he pushed us down hill and we had to climb up again, I still remember all the children screaming with delight, it was so exciting, my father had trouble dragging us away. When we did get home, shivering with cold, we were only too glad, there was my mother in our warm and cozy kitchen waiting for us with hot buttered toast and tea with a tiny bit of rum.

We were not religious, but sometimes we went to a synagogue, there was a special service for children and young people on Friday afternoons, with a choir, and of course weddings were performed there. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, my grandparents fasted and spent the day there, and we would visit them and play in the yard with the other children.

One thing I must admit, I was fascinated by churches. The mostly gothic buildings with their rich interiors and the smell of incense drew me like a magnet. It had nothing to do with religion, I just liked to go there, and one of my friends, a Catholic girl, was only too happy to oblige. She tried to convert me and took me to mass a few times, but I wasn't interested, I only liked to watch. The same with Christmas, I loved the weeks before the holidays, with all the shops beautifully decorated and lit up and Christmas trees everywhere, it was all very festive, but it didn't mean anything to me. I was quite happy to be

Jewish.

Whenever I had a chance I went to the movies. All the kids my age were crazy about Shirley Temple, she was our role model. We sang her songs, tried to tap dance and envied anyone who had dimples. I longed to have curls, but my hair was completely straight. My father's cousin who owned a hair dressing salon came to the rescue and gave me my first perm. Never mind that I had to sit for hours under an enormous contraption, I was in seventh heaven, I finally had cork screw curls just like Shirley Temple.

When I was ten years old I went to summer camp for the first (and only) time in Voslau near Baden, a famous spa. We stayed in a castle with magnificent grounds and a swimming pool, and I had a wonderful time. I spent a whole month there and made some new friends, amongst them two girls who went to ballet school and couldn't stop talking about it, and soon our favorite activity became dancing. When we started to rehearse for our farewell performance, which was a musical based on a poem by Schiller, I was chosen to take part in a ballet scene. I was ecstatic with joy, but terrified at the thought of being on stage in front of a big audience, all the families were invited, as is customary at the end of camp. I had no need to worry though, everything went off well and the evening was a huge success. When we had to leave that same night, we were all in tears, it had been a wonderful summer.

When I returned home all I could think of was dancing. I nagged my parents to let me go to ballet school, but they couldn't really afford it. Finally my mother took me there and the teacher agreed that I had talent, and that she would take me for a reduced fee. From then on my life changed, I went almost every day to classes, we learned ballet, tap dancing, we did acrobatics, and when I didn't take part, I just hung around watching others. Some of the former students, who were now professional dancers, came often to practice, and we all dreamed to follow in their footsteps.

During that time I became interested in Zionist youth movements and joined Blue–White. We met once or twice a week, learned Hebrew songs, danced the Hora and learned about Israel, which of course was called Palestine then. We celebrated the Jewish holidays with parties, our favorite being Purim, dressing up was a lot of fun, at the same time we learned Jewish history and the meaning of the holidays. Most of us came from secular backgrounds and we enjoyed it very much.

My sister played a very important part in my life. When she was a baby I just regarded her as a nuisance, but later we became very close. She was a quiet child, being handicapped made her withdrawn. Her left arm was partly paralyzed, she couldn't lift it without the help of her right arm, and she didn't have full use of her left hand. School was difficult for her, although she was very bright. She couldn't even hold down her exercise book while writing, she had no strength in her hand. She wouldn't take part in sports and games like the

other children, she felt too self conscious. There was an excellent school for handicapped children in Vienna, it was quite far from where we lived, and it was difficult to get into, but my parents succeeded. The school had the best teachers, physiotherapists and other professionals who helped the children to develop to their full potential. The handicaps were varied, some were light like my sister, others were much more severe. Many children remained paralyzed after Polio, some children had lost limbs in accidents, and all of them were cared for with love and patience. The school was in a different district and since my sister was too young to travel by streetcar on her own, one of my parents had to take her. It was not easy for them, but Evy loved the special attention she received and did very well.

In March 1938, when I was twelve years old, my whole world fell apart and everything changed. Up to that time I had been a happy and carefree child, with a fierce love and pride in my beautiful Vienna, and suddenly it became a menacing and frightening place. I will never forget that last evening before the Anschluss. We were all listening to the radio, it was the night before elections, when we heard our chancellor, announcing in a choked voice, his decision to abdicate. I can still hear him saying, "God bless Austria". We were stunned, but we didn't really know what was going to happen, we had heard stories about persecutions in Germany, but we never thought it could come to that. How wrong we were, what took a while in Germany, came about literally overnight. The next morning the streets were packed with men in Nazi uniforms, singing and shouting, mostly "Sieg heil" and "Juden raus". I can still hear the words of the Horst Wessel song "Wenn Judenblut vom Messer spritzt" (when Jewish blood drips from the knife). We were afraid to leave home, we could watch from our second floor window what was going on in the street. The mob had gone crazy, Jews were beaten up, Jewish owned stores were ransacked, and everywhere one could hear the sound of breaking glass. After a few days things calmed down a little and we tried to come to terms with the new situation. My father still had a job (not for long though) and we went back to school, but nothing was the same anymore. In class we were separated from the other children, nobody wanted to play with us, I imagine that even if they wanted to, they were afraid. In our apartment building reactions were mixed, some of our neighbors remained friendly when nobody was watching, others wouldn't look at us anymore. Somehow life went on, but the fear and uncertainty grew with every new proclamation and announcement. Jews were forbidden to own jewelry, radios and various other items, all these items had to be brought to a certain place, where they were collected. We received special identity cards with "Sara" for women and "Israel" for men in front of our real name. In the street children would taunt us, calling us dirty Jews, sometimes throwing things at us, but on the whole our family was lucky, none of us got hurt in those early days.

I grew up very fast, where before the grown ups talked in whispers about things that were not for our ears, now there were no secrets, we knew everything that was going on. Many people committed suicide out of despair, others managed to flee, but we belonged to that optimistic and naive majority who believed that it wouldn't last and that everything would be back to normal again. Not that we had much of a choice, we had no family abroad and no money, no foreign country would have let us in. I still remember the long queues in front of embassies and consulates. Meanwhile we tried to lead a reasonable normal life as far as it was possible under the circumstances, but our lives became very restricted. Everything was forbidden for Jews, no more cinema, theater, coffee houses, even the park benches had signs "not for Jews". All this was bad enough, but then came "Crystal Night", November 11, 1938. A German diplomat had been shot by a Jew in Paris and the Nazis used this to stage a pogrom. For me the day started as usual by going to school, but there was a palpable tension in the air, we were sent home early and told not to dawdle on the way. When I arrived home, the whole family was there, everybody was anxiously waiting for me. I can still see us sitting there, talking, trying to keep calm, hiding from each other our fear.

Suddenly we heard loud noises in the building, shouting, the trampling of heavy boots and finally the dreaded knock on the door. Four armed storm troupers burst in and fell upon my father, beating him and pushing him down the stairs, two of them following him, while the other two told my grandfather to come with them. Then the most amazing thing happened, my grandfather stood before them and refused to go, he told them that he was an old man, he'd served his Kaiser in the great war, and that he would not leave his home. They could easily have taken him, he was quite frail, but strangely enough they turned on their heels and left without a word. That day most of the men in Vienna were arrested, and sent to concentration camps, all the synagogues went up in flames, and many homes and businesses were destroyed.

After the men left with my father, we were all in shock. My grandfather collapsed, my grandmother was crying, and Evy and I sat huddled together, too frightened to move. My mother put grandfather to bed, she tried to calm us down, but wasn't too successful. In the midst of all this one of our Gentile neighbors came in and took charge. She lived with her sister and brother on the same floor, but we hardly knew them. She insisted on taking me and Evy to their apartment, and we stayed there until the next day. They were all three elderly people, had never been married, and kept very much to themselves. When they witnessed what went on, they decided to take a stand and help. They fussed over us, talked to us, kept feeding us, and were so kind to us, that we slowly recovered. When we went home again, we found only my mother and grandmother there, my grandfather had been taken to hospital, he had suffered his first heart attack. After a few days he returned home, but he was

never the same, the joy had gone out of his life. From my father we heard nothing, until one day an SS officer stood in front of our door. My mother almost fainted, but he came in quietly, he told us that he was a class mate of my father and had spoken to him in one of Vienna's prisons, and that he was well. He took some food for him and when he left, I remember my mother and grandmother so overcome with gratitude and relief, they didn't know how to thank him, finally my grandmother managed to grab his hand and to his embarrassment kissed it. Such were the times, that any act of kindness could evoke such intense emotions.

For six weeks we heard nothing from my father directly, but rumors were flying around that all the men had been taken to concentration camps. Finally we received a postcard from Dachau, telling us that he was fine, and that he was treated well. We were greatly relieved at first, but then many people began to receive death notices from Dachau. My father was allowed one postcard a month and his pleas to get released became more urgent, but the only way to get a release was a visa to another country. I still don't know how my mother managed it, she obtained a passage to Shanghai for him, and in May 1939 he came home. We were all ecstatic to see him again, he looked well, but he was not the same carefree person anymore. Reluctantly he started to talk about his experiences, although he was careful not to say too much in front of us children, but we heard enough to know what concentration camp meant.

During the period my father was away, many things changed. My mother became the head of the family, without her we would have starved. She got a job working as a nurse in an Institute for the Blind which was under the auspices of the Jewish Kultus Gemeinde (an organization which became more and more important to the Jews left in Vienna.) She received some rudimentary training and worked there devotedly until our deportation. Since there was no one to take my sister to school, the task fell to me. It took almost an hour to get to her school, so it was arranged for me to join my sister. It was a strange situation, here I was, the only healthy child in a school for the handicapped. For me it was a very rewarding experience, I was given the opportunity to help other children, and the responsibility made me feel great. There was no discrimination, although against the staff's wishes, by orders from above, the few Jewish children of various ages studied in a separate classroom. Actually we were only five, we had a wonderful teacher, and each child got private lessons. This was a happy time for me, I loved the school, but it didn't last long. After a few months we had to leave the school, all the schools were closed to Jewish children.

My father remained with us, he couldn't leave as the passage to Shanghai proved to be a fraud. I don't know the details, but apparently it was enough to be released from Dachau. The situation became very difficult, he had to report to the Gestapo once a month, and every time he came home more despondent.

Finally in October 1939 he was deported to Poland with another few thousand men who had failed to leave Vienna in time.

We were devastated, for the second time we were deprived of our father. During that time we had to vacate our apartment and move into another one which we had to share with five more people. my mother, grandmother, Evy and I had to sleep in one room with an old lady, (my grandfather lived in a nursing home by then), the other room was occupied by a couple with two boys. We all shared one kitchen and bathroom, it was very crowded, but I found a good friend in the older boy, he was my age and we spent many pleasant hours together. His family was religious and he loved teaching me, he opened a different world for me. He was very bright and I enjoyed being with him. He was very curious about me, he had never even spoken to a girl before, and here we were thrown together by circumstances. He wanted to know all about my life, to him I was like a creature from another planet. He had lived a very sheltered existence, suddenly everything changed for him and he was utterly bewildered. I am saddened when I think of him, he was such a gentle boy, it hurts me that I can't even remember his name. He and his family were deported before us, he wrote me a postcard from the Lodz Ghetto and that's the last I heard of him.

Life became more difficult with every month that passed. We had to wear the yellow star, most shops wouldn't sell to Jews, in the tram or train we had to stand at the back, and later when food became scarce due to the war, we were the first to suffer. There was no privacy in the apartment, the only place where I could be alone was the toilet, so I got into the habit to take a book and escape there whenever I felt the need to be by myself. Little did I know what crowded together really meant.

Since there was no school, my mother let me visit the family in Znaim. After the Nazis had taken over the Sudetenland and made it part of Germany, there was no border to cross. It was only three hours by train and this was the first time I went alone. My grandparents were still there, but this time I stayed with my cousins. Their father was in jail for being a communist (he was not Jewish), my father was away, so we had a lot in common. Still, being young, we made the best of our time together. I had never been in Znaim in the winter, everything was covered in deep snow and we could ski in the streets and skate on frozen ponds, we had a lot of fun. I stayed for two weeks, that was the last time I saw the whole family together

During that time, when there was nothing for us children to do, the various Jewish and Zionist organizations took over. The Jewish agency sent counselors from Palestine (they were real heroes who endangered their lives to help us), they set up improvised classrooms for the older children, the younger ones like Evy went to a kind of daycare center. There was no shortage of good teachers, they were all unemployed and only too happy to do something useful. For me it

was great to get out of the house and be together with other young people. Some days we went to work in the fields outside Vienna to prepare us for work in Palestine, we learned Hebrew, Jewish history and geography, and we dreamed of living on a Kibbutz (the counselors came mostly from Kibbutzim). I loved looking at pictures of Palestine, my favorites were photos of Tel–Aviv, all the houses looked so modern and white in the bright sunlight, I was longing to be there. I knew there was no way for me to leave Vienna at that time, but I still had hopes for a better future. At least my days were filled with studies and other activities and I had a busy social life. In the evenings there was a curfew, Jews were not allowed on the streets after a certain hour so we couldn't go out.

In 1940 my grandmother died suddenly, she just collapsed. For her life had become unbearable, her husband in a nursing home, her beloved only son deported with no word from him and sharing a tiny apartment with strangers, she just lost her will to live. It was my first encounter with death and I was heart broken, she was part of my life since birth and I missed her terribly. It was difficult breaking the news to grandfather, but he took it better than we thought. We always went to visit him on Sundays right up to the time we were deported. He was still alive then, I can imagine how he felt when nobody came to visit him anymore, we never had a chance to say good–bye.

Our family was shrinking, now there were only mother, Evy and I, and we became closer than ever. I remember my mother saying that we should be grateful to still have a roof over our heads, a bed to sleep in and enough to eat. She was so right, by then so many families had been deported, the Jewish community grew smaller month by month.

In spite of all the hardships I still managed to enjoy life. I was a normal teenager, surrounded by other teenagers, and we tried to make the best of it. During that time I discovered BOYS. I was in a permanent state of love, not necessarily with the same boy. I remember the excitement of my first kiss, his name was Maxi, he was a very good–looking boy, but not very faithful. It didn't take me long to find somebody else, I was never long without a boyfriend. It may seem strange that with the world around us falling apart we could behave as if nothing was happening, but we were young, living from day to day and hoping for a better future.

One day, in the spring of 1941, I was one of fifty girls who were called up to work in Germany. We were sent to harvest asparagus, a vegetable which I hardly knew, but which I thoroughly grew to detest. We arrived outside Stendal, a town near Magdeburg, after a long journey by train. At first we thought of it as a great adventure, but that thought didn't last long. The first morning the work looked easy. Asparagus grows in small mounds, when a crack appears one has to dig down carefully with one hand to free the stem, then cut it at the bottom with a knife held in the other hand. We were each assigned ten long rows, we started with enthusiasm, but after a while we got

tired and sat down more and more often, we were not exactly farmers, none of us was used to hard physical work. Suddenly the supervisors came screaming, they threatened us with dire consequences if we didn't finish our work, and then it dawned on us that this was serious and for the first time we were truly frightened. The work was backbreaking, we were not allowed to rest and the hours seemed endless. At least the food was sufficient, we got lots of asparagus to eat (all the ones we ruined by cutting off their heads). Fortunately our agricultural career came to an abrupt halt by an outbreak of scarlet fever, six of us got sick and of course one of them had to be me. We were taken to hospital in Stendal and the rest of the girls were sent home. The hospital was run by a Catholic order and the nuns treated us with great kindness. It was such a relief after the rough treatment at the hands of our slave drivers. Because we were contagious we had to remain in hospital for a few weeks, although we got better very quickly. We missed home and our families, but otherwise our stay there was quite pleasant. We had a nice room, good food and plenty to amuse ourselves.

There were still some Jewish families left in Stendal and when they found out about us they couldn't do enough for us. When we were released from hospital each of us was invited to spend our last day with one of the families and I still remember that day. I was treated like a princess, showered with gifts, and when they took me to the railway station we all cried.

When I arrived back in Vienna a wonderful surprise awaited me. A few days before my mother had received a letter from my father, it was the first sign of life since his deportation over one and a half years ago. He told us everything that had happened to him during that time. After working in a camp in Poland in freezing temperatures and unbearable conditions he managed to escape over the border into Russia. He wrote that he lived in Kiev, was well and studied medicine again, he said he missed us and hoped to see us again soon. We were so happy and relieved, at least we knew he was alive. Shortly after that Russia entered the war with Germany and no more letters arrived, but I never gave up hope that one day we would hear from him again. It did happen, but I never imagined it would take another twenty years! After my return to Vienna I had to register at the local employment office, since my short–lived sojourn into agriculture I had officially joined the work force. I must admit I wasn't very keen, but I had no choice. Meanwhile our "school" had been disbanded, all the young people had been recruited to work, the only time we still got together was on weekends. I got a job in a cigarette paper factory where I operated a machine for eight hours a day. It was tiring, but we were treated quite decently and I even received a pay check, which came in very handy as our food rations became smaller and smaller and we used the money to buy food on the black market. The factory was in a different district quite far from where we lived, but close to the Institute for the Blind where my mother worked, so I often went

there and we went home together by train. Sometimes I had to wait for her, but I didn't mind, among the blind there were a number of young people my age and we became good friends. Most of them had been blind since birth and I was amazed how well they coped.

My social life was very restricted, when we met at our youth movement headquarters our hearts were not in it any more. We tried to have a good time, but the deportations were in full swing and every time more people were missing. The number of Jews dwindled rapidly, we were spared only because of my mother's job, but we knew that our turn would come eventually. Not that living in Vienna was a picnic, but at least it was better than the unknown fate that awaited us. We knew very little of what happened to the transports, what we heard were mostly unreliable rumors. We had heard about ghettos and camps, but we didn't know how bad the situation really was, at least we didn't want to know. I wanted to believe (that's what we were told), that we would be sent to work somewhere in the east, but I always was and still am an optimist, in the worst situation I find something which gives me a glimmer of hope.

Finally, one day, at the end of July 1942, we were notified to be ready and packed within 24 hours. As we had been expecting it for some time, we had already sorted out the things we wanted to take with us, each of us was allowed one suitcase and one bedroll, the rest we just had to leave behind. The collection point was my former school which had been turned into a transit camp. In each classroom there were about thirty people, sleeping on the floor, it was very crowded and the sanitary conditions were appalling. Most of the families consisted of mothers, their children and old people, the men had been taken away long ago. The school had a big courtyard, and as it was summer, we could spend most our time outside. There I met some of my friends, one of them a girl I had met at my grandfather's nursing home. She also used to visit a relative there and we saw each other every weekend. We had a lot in common and came from similar backgrounds, that's how Ditta and I became close friends.

When we arrived we had no idea how long we would be there nor where we would be going. Over the years we had learned to live in a permanent state of fear and uncertainty, but that doesn't mean that I was resigned to our fate. I was thinking that we would be sent to work somewhere and that we would survive the war. I know it sounds silly and naive in view of all that happened to us later, but in those days I never thought of death.

Meanwhile my friends and I passed the time as best we could, roaming the corridors, playing games, but mostly sitting around the school yard talking. We talked about the future, made plans what we were going to do when the war was over, and tried not to let our fears take hold of us.

On September 12th, six weeks after we arrived at the school, the day of our deportation finally came. We were taken to the railway station, of all the

stations in Vienna it had to be the one from where we used to take the train to Znaim for all these years, but this time we didn't know our destination. When the train pulled out of the station, I looked back for a last glimpse of Vienna, the city I had loved so much, but didn't want me anymore, and I wondered whether I would ever see it again. I was sixteen and an important part of my life had come to an end.

The journey passed quickly, it was an ordinary train, not a cattle car, and we were quite comfortable. I can't remember much about our arrival in Theresienstadt, everything is very confused in my mind. I remember waiting and waiting for many hours somewhere in the open, then walking through the streets of the town towards my new "home". While we were walking along, dragging our belongings, the most amazing thing happened. We heard somebody call "Mitzie"(my mother's pet name, her real name was Marianne), and there was my grandmother.

Whenever a transport came from Vienna, she came looking for us and this time she found us. We were so happy to see her, we hadn't heard from her for ages and didn't know whether she was even alive. She told us that my grandfather had died some time ago in another camp and that she and the rest of the family had arrived a few weeks before.

My uncle Arthur with his wife and two little girls were the only ones left apart from my grandmother. My aunts Elsa, Grete and Luise had all been there and deported together with their spouses, just a few weeks before we arrived. We hadn't seen them for years, and to miss them by such a short time made us terribly sad. Still it was good to have at least part of the family there, it was not the ideal place for a reunion, but it was not our choice.

The first night we spent in an attic which was filled with old and sick people. It was like a scene from hell, the stench was overpowering as almost everybody there had dysentery, the noise was unbearable and none of us slept. In any case there was hardly enough room to sit. Fortunately the next day we were all rescued from that horrible place, my mother moved to a house where she shared a room with a few women, and Evy and I went to live in the children's home, Evy with children her age and I was together again with Ditta and some of my other friends. There was no privacy, we were about twenty in a room, but after that first night in the attic it looked like heaven. We had a school there and our days were filled with all kinds of activities, we talked for hours and even managed to have fun.

My mother worked in the hospital and we saw each other almost every day. During the last few years we had become very close, she treated me like a grown–up and shared her thoughts and feelings with me. She always said that we must be strong and protect Evy and look after her because she was vulnerable and needed us. She told me how proud she was of me and how much she relied on me, she felt as long as we were together we would survive.

Since I was a little girl I had been closer to my father, but only when he was sent away, did I get to know and appreciate my mother. I admired her courage and strength, she never panicked and remained calm in the most difficult circumstances. I tried very hard to live up to her and never to disappoint her.

After a few months a place became vacant in my mother's room and I moved out of the children's home. There I had lived a sheltered life, now I joined the everyday life of the ghetto. I was assigned to a work group, we were sent out every morning to different places, some better, some worse. I soon learned to take advantage of my jobs, when I worked outside the ghetto in the fields, for example, I smuggled in some vegetables and fruit. Of course it was forbidden, but we all took the chance. The best jobs were the ones that had to do with food, I could always pinch something, nobody called that stealing though, we had different names for that.

Theresienstadt was a strange and confusing place. It was a garrison town with private buildings and army barracks meant for a few thousand people, but we numbered at least ten times as many. It looked like a normal town with shops that sold items stolen from our luggage, a coffeehouse where an orchestra played every afternoon, a library, performances of operas and plays, but behind the facade there was unbelievable misery. Many old and sick people who couldn't work were dying of starvation, diseases like typhus and dysentery were rampant.

On the other hand many people lived quite well, had enough to eat and were beautifully dressed. We still had the clothes we had brought with us although some items were stolen. Since we had no money (except for some useless fake money) we could get everything by barter. I remember I had a fashionable black winter coat with fur trimmings which I got in exchange for some food. That coat was my pride and joy, and it kept me warm throughout the whole winter.

I still kept in touch with my friends at the children's home. Evy was living there and I visited often. My resentment and jealousy of her were long gone, I loved her and worried about her all the time. She liked living there and was well looked after, but she was often ill, she seemed to get every disease that was going around. In contrast to that I remained surprisingly healthy, considering my childhood record when I was the one who contracted every disease in sight.

As time passed I learned my way around the ghetto, made new friends and took advantage of the few good things that were available, like concerts, plays, opera and a very well stocked library. I had always been an avid reader, and being able to get all the books I wanted was great and it helped me to forget my surroundings for hours on end.

Then my whole life changed. One day, as I stood in line for my lunch, I noticed the handsome young man, who ladled out the soup, looking at me.

When my turn came he smiled at me with his beautiful teeth and gave me an extra scoop, so of course the next day I made sure to stand in the line that would lead me to him. This time he asked me if I would meet him after work, which I did gladly. We started going out together and fell in love. Carl had come from Czechoslovakia together with his mother and younger brother a few months before me and was well settled when we met. He was older than me, he was twenty one and I was sixteen and a half. Like most of the Czechs he spoke good German, so we had no problem communicating. He worked in the most coveted place – the kitchen. He was very resourceful and clever, he found a little broken down shack in the backyard of a building which he fixed up, and there I moved in with him after a while. It wasn't exactly Buckingham Palace, but to us it was like a real home, we were very happy together. We had everything we wanted, we were able to help our families, we had good friends and enjoyed life. I even learned more than I wanted to know about football. Carl was a keen football player, and he played every Sunday in the courtyard of one of the barracks where the matches took place. I had no interest at all in football, but he begged me to come when he played, so I went with him. I can't say that I ever got very excited about football, but it made him happy when I was watching. He was a genuinely nice person, kind, generous and very good natured.

As much as we tried to ignore the world around us, the harsh realities of ghetto life intruded upon us. Deportations became more frequent, and one day in January 1944 the dreaded notification came. Carl had to be at the collection point within twenty four hours. I wanted to go with him, I couldn't bear the thought of being separated from him.

When I went to register for the transport I was told that only Czechs were allowed to go and that maybe if we were married I would have a chance. There was no question in my mind, I was determined to go with Carl. We found a Rabbi, who told us that he was prepared to perform the ceremony but that I needed my mother's written permission, as I was under age. Reluctantly my mother signed, she loved Carl, but she obviously didn't want me to go. The wedding was supposed to take place in the afternoon, meanwhile we found out that I couldn't join the transport in any case, it was too late. Under the circumstances there was no hurry to get married, we promised each other to have a proper wedding after the war. The next morning I went with Carl to the collection point, we stood together in the freezing cold until it was time for him to go. It was a huge transport, this time mostly young people in contrast to former deportations. The scenes around us were heartbreaking as families were torn apart. Finally, with tears, we said our last good–bye and he left. I never saw Carl again, his was one of the first transports to Auschwitz and they all went straight to the gas chambers. At the time I didn't know that, I thought it was only a temporary separation, I had no idea how close I had come to share

the same fate.

When I think back I ask myself how I could have been so naive to believe that everything would turn out all right in the end, and that we would all survive and see each other again. The truth is I didn't want to know, I preferred not to listen to rumors and not to give up hope.

Meanwhile life went on, although it became more difficult, there was now a transport every week and we knew that it was only a matter of time before our turn came. My grandmother had been sent away some time ago, but my uncle and his family were still there, and we became very close. We had hardly known them, they had lived in another town in Czechoslovakia and had come to Znaim only on rare occasions.

Finally in May 1944 we received the dreaded notification, but at least my mother, Evy and I were together on the same transport. Life in Theresienstadt had been hard, with many ups and downs, but I had been happy there as well, and now the future was more uncertain than ever. We packed our belongings (which was a wasted effort, we never saw them again), and went to the railway station. This time it was no passenger train, we were packed in a cattle car until there was no room to sit, we practically sat on top of each other. I have only vague memories of that journey, I don't even remember how long it lasted, it seemed interminable. We were hungry and thirsty, there was only one or two buckets for relieving ourselves, and the stench was unbearable. Some old people died, some were squashed to death and we were so crowded together that we just sat on them . When the train stopped and the doors were opened, all hell broke loose. The platform was brightly lit, we heard shouting, the two favorite words used by the Germans – "raus" and "schnell" ("out" and "hurry"). Blinded by the light, we had been in the dark for so long we couldn't see, we tumbled out, holding on to each other and stood there, totally confused. What was this place we had come to?

When I think back to our arrival in Auschwitz all that comes to mind is terror and confusion. I have flashes of memory, seeing myself in different places without knowing how I got there. I remember standing naked in a shower, cold water pouring over me, without soap or towel. Then, clothed in a striped dress with wooden clogs on my feet, nothing else, no underwear, getting a number tattooed on my arm, A–1743. Finally ending up in a big barrack, surrounded by crowds of people, but at least still together with my mother and sister. Ours was the only family camp, all the people from the Theresienstadt transport came there first, although not for long. Men and women lived in different quarters, but we shared the same latrines, one of many cruel jokes of our captors. During the day the families could be together for a few hours, sitting or standing around on the street in front of the barracks. I was hungry, I was afraid and although I knew what went on around me I tried to push it out of my mind. How I did that I don't know, it was impossible to ignore the smell of

burning and the red sky, but I didn't want to think of death. I don't remember exactly how long I was in this camp, it is curious how well I recall some events and dates, but others are shrouded in a fog. I know it was till after my eighteenth birthday, which was in June.

Then came my first experience, but not my last, with a selection. It was most humiliating parading naked in front of everybody, but the worst part of it was being separated from mother and Evy. It was the first time I found myself alone and I was devastated. We were marched to another camp across the railway line and there I found the real horror that was Auschwitz. In bunks that were supposed to sleep three we were ten or more pushed together so that we could hardly sit, let alone lie down. Sleep was almost impossible, we couldn't move. The food consisted of watery soup with some rotten vegetable leaves floating around once a day, ladled out in bowls of different sizes. If it was a bigger bowl, two or three of us had to share, without spoons. What that means is easy to imagine. In the evening we received a small chunk of bread with a little margarine for supper and breakfast, which of course was ludicrous, how can one save a piece of bread if one is starving, and where was one supposed to keep it, there was no place to hide it. Mornings and evenings we got something to drink that was called tea and that was the extent of our nourishment. The latrines were out of bounds during the night and most of the day, and since almost everybody suffered from diarrhea it was sheer torture. Twice a day we had roll call, which meant standing outside for hours, in every weather, to be counted. Sometimes it was very hot, people fainted and got burned from the sun, sometimes we stood in the rain, and as we had no change of clothes, we remained wet for hours afterwards. During the day we were not allowed inside the barracks, when not standing to be counted we just sat around talking. There were women from most countries of Europe but almost everybody spoke some German, it was essential for survival.

Since we were always hungry, most of our conversation centered around food. The older women, who had been housewives were exchanging recipes, often debating which ingredients were better in a certain dish. It may seem strange that in such surroundings one could talk about how many eggs to use for a chocolate cake, but it was a way of remembering the happy times of the past and not to think of the present.

And then there was the music. Whenever a group of women marched past on their way to or from work, the band accompanied them, so every morning and evening, while we stood at roll call, we had the pleasure of listening to military marches, on other occasions we were treated to Strauss waltzes.

As if life wasn't difficult enough, everything had to be done in a hurry. We were always chased around, into the barrack, out of the barrack, wherever we had to be, it was always "quickly, quickly". People who couldn't move fast enough got beaten over the head with sticks, I was lucky, in spite of my

weakened condition I could still move fast and keep out of the way of our tormentors. Many of the people in charge were prisoners as well and just as cruel as the SS. I particularly remember a Kapo by the name of Willy, everybody was terrified of him. Shortly after the war, one day as I was walking on the street in Hamburg, I saw him. I couldn't move, I was completely paralyzed with fear. It took me a while to pull myself together, but by that time he was gone.

It is amazing how little we really need to live, I don't mean living comfortably, just staying alive. I owned nothing, all I had was a dress and a pair of clogs, not even a comb or a toothbrush, not to speak of toilet paper. We had no need for towels or soap, we never washed. When I had my last period the blood just ran down my legs, I had nothing to wipe it away. Mercifully the periods stopped after a while due to malnutrition.

One day, after I had given up all hope of ever seeing them again, my mother and sister arrived with a group from another camp. How they passed a selection I'll never know, Evy was skin and bones, maybe because she was tall for her age (13). We were so happy to be united again, for a short while we could forget our surroundings. I don't know how long we could have survived in this camp if we would have remained there. Hunger, sleep deprivation due to crowding and diarrhea took their toll. Still we made it together through another selection and left Auschwitz at the beginning of August, our destination Stutthof. It was called "Waldlager Stutthof" (forest camp), it said so at the entrance. There was a forest, but only to hide the camp, it was similar to all the other concentration camps. The conditions were slightly better, we were told that we would be send to work and we were issued different clothes. This time no striped dress, but a skirt and blouse (with a big red painted star on the back), and some other items of clothing, maybe even some underwear, but I am not sure about that. .

After a few days, on August 10th early in the morning, while we were standing outside shivering, the guards started calling out names. When my turn came, I went to join the group that had formed, fully expecting to see my mother and sister follow me. I looked around, but they were nowhere in sight, and I never saw them again.

We were marched off to the railway station and traveled to Marienburg in West Prussia, from there we were taken to various farms. I must admit I wasn't too worried at the time, I was sure that mother and Evy were sent to another farm through some mix–up in the list of names, which proved to be true. What happened to them I only found out much later. Our group of six arrived at a big farm, Ditta with her mother, and an older woman called Helene and two other girls. All the German males were away in the war, so there were only women in the house, the matriarch was a mean old bitch who ruled everybody, including her family, with an iron hand. We worked long hours in the fields, and after

work we were locked up in a cellar, where we slept on bags that had been spread over potatoes. The food was not too bad, at least it was sufficient, but after the camps everything was a big improvement. We worked together with British prisoners of war, who had been there since Dunkirk, and most of them spoke German. They tried to help us by making our workload easier, they didn't have much freedom either, they had an armed guard watching over them and they too were locked in at night, although not in a potato cellar. Their living conditions were much better than ours, and they received Red Cross parcels regularly, they were very generous and always shared something with us.

One thing made my life a misery, I came out in boils. I had kept surprisingly healthy all the time in the camps, and now when I had enough to eat and became stronger this curse fell upon me. I had boils in the most inconvenient places, and since I had to do hard physical work, I was in constant pain. I had nothing to treat it with but never complained, I was too afraid to be sent back to Stutthof. It lasted for weeks, but eventually tapered off. At that time I was transferred to a neighboring farm together with Helene, where my life improved dramatically. It was a small farm, run by a woman who was not exactly kind, but at least human. We ate really well (Helene worked in the kitchen) and we shared a normal room with furniture and even slept in a bed. I worked in the fields again with a small group of Englishmen, their guard was a kind old man who left them alone most of the time and he turned a blind eye when they did most of my work. But the best thing that happened was my friendship with Pat, one of the Englishmen. The guard permitted us to sit together in the kitchen after work where we could talk undisturbed, until it was time for us to be locked up. Pat was a kind and generous person, and fun to be with. He shared his parcels with me and for the first time in many months I had a toothbrush, a comb and sweet smelling soap again. After being deprived for so long these were real treasures.

This was a happy time for me, I had plenty to eat, the work was not too hard, I even found books to read and I had my friendship with Pat. When the harvest was over in November, we were sent back to Stutthof. Before we left, Pat gave me his address in London and I learned it by heart, but I never heard from him again although I tried to send a letter after the war. It was very hard saying good–bye to the good life and particularly to Pat, but I consoled myself with the thought of seeing mother and Evy again. Those few months on the farm probably saved my life, I was strong and healthy again and full of hope. When we arrived back in the camp we had to change into prison clothing again, and my few possessions which I had accumulated were taken away, except for a small bar of soap which I hid in my hand the whole time. I never used it, I just held it to my nose to smell the fragrance. It wasn't easy to hide it, I had no pockets, still I managed to hang on to it for a long time.

The sight that greeted us in the camp is difficult to describe. The women

who were left behind or were sent back from the farm because of sickness looked all alike, they had become walking skeletons. I was searching for my mother and Evy, but I was afraid that I would not recognize them even if I found them. I called out their names, but to no avail, I was torn between the desperate desire to find them and the cowardly wish not to see them like this. I knew there was no hope for any of them to remain alive, they were too far gone, at least I didn't have to watch them die.

Conditions in the camp were terrible, inside the barrack we were so crowded, we had to sit huddled together on the floor, there was no room to stretch out. Outside stacks of corpses were piled up, when people died, mostly of starvation, their bodies were just thrown on top of the pile. Since we spent the whole day outside, we had to sit right next to the bodies, even eat our meager rations there, we had no choice, there was no other place. This period was one of the worst in my life, everywhere we were surrounded by death, and the terrible truth is that after a few days I felt nothing, I could sit next to a dead body and not see it.

I don't think we remained in Stutthof for more than two weeks, all of us who had returned from the farms in good physical condition were sent to a work camp in Stobboy by Elbing, which is further east in Prussia. We had to dig tank traps, three and a half meter deep ditches, supposedly to halt the Russian troops from advancing. The work was back breaking, every morning we trudged from the camp in deep mud to the work site, breaking first the ice with pickaxes and then digging in the icy soil. When the ice melted we often stood in deep water up to our knees. We worked till dark with only a short break for eating our soup, and then we dragged ourselves back to camp. We slept in round huts on straw, in the middle there was a wood burning stove which we lit as soon as we came in, feeding it with kindling that we picked up outside.

Before we left Stutthof we were issued with what was their idea of warm clothing, everybody receiving different items. My fashion statement consisted of a striped dress, a thin black coat with the lining ripped out, a sweater full of holes and a pair of long underpants. The rest of our clothes we supplemented with pieces of blankets which we tore up, strips for our feet (we had no socks) and a wide strip around our middle, under the coat of course. If caught, punishment was severe, but we took that risk. Since we only had one blanket each, two of us shared one to cover ourselves, the other one we used to keep warm during the day. It was very warm sleeping in the straw and we slept close together, one blanket for two was enough, and we never took off all our clothes anyway. The only part of my anatomy that was ever washed was my face, usually with snow from outside the hut.

At work it was bitter cold, much below zero, and we could see fires burning every few meters where the guards warmed themselves while we were freezing.

There was a group of Wehrmacht soldiers among the SS guards and a few were quite nice and talked to us sometimes.

Every morning and evening two people from every hut had to go to the kitchen outside the camp to fetch the food. One day before dawn, when it was my turn, we passed a group of prisoners. One of them said a few words in English which I didn't understand and pressed something into my hand. It was a tin of some fish, but I had nothing to open it with. Finally Ditta and I succeeded to make some holes in it and we shared it. It wasn't much, but that kind gesture restored me for a while.

Gradually the hard work and the bitter cold took their toll, I became weaker and suffered from frostbite on my feet. And then something happened that I had been lucky enough to escape from till then. I was beaten by an SS man while standing in line for my soup, for no reason at all. When I fell he continued beating me with his stick until people pulled me away. I was taken to the sickbay and remained there for the next few days. There wasn't much of a medical treatment, but it was warm and I didn't have to go to work. One of the young soldiers who had talked to me sometimes came to see how I was. He had witnessed the beating and felt sorry for me, he was one of the people who had pulled me away. I will never forget his kindness, he was very brave. I never had to return to work. The Russians had advanced within a short distance of our camp and we were evacuated. All the people were put on trucks and sent back to Stutthof. When we arrived our truck with all the sick people was standing a little further away from the others. Without thinking I jumped off and mingled with the other people, who had meanwhile gathered in front of their trucks. I don't know what made me do it, I was certainly no hero, I always tried to be as inconspicuous as possible and not to be noticed. This one act of daring saved my life, plus the fact that in the chaos nobody saw me. Nobody on that truck was ever seen again.

The situation in the camp was now completely different from before. It was less crowded and roll calls were short, we were permitted to be indoors most of the time, but there was not much food. However we took advantage of the fact that the Germans were not paying too much attention to us, and we managed to find some edible things here and there. We spent our time sitting around on our bunks looking for lice. These were body lice, hiding in the seams of clothing, the type that carried Typhus. It was a losing battle, we couldn't really get rid of them. Meanwhile the war had moved closer, we saw planes flying overhead and heard bombs falling, during the last days the Germans had become very nervous, we knew that we wouldn't remain in the camp for long. We only hoped that they wouldn't kill us at the last moment, we thought the war was going to be over any minute. That of course was wishful thinking, the war dragged on for another few months.

One day in January we were called outside and marched off. The first few

kilometers our guards tried to keep up a brisk tempo, but after a while people fell and were unable to get up. Some were shot, some were just left behind and the rest trudged on, the Germans were in a great hurry to leave, and didn't care what happened to us, they wanted to save their own skin. I was in great pain from my frostbitten feet and couldn't walk anymore, so I sat down on the side of the road. There was a wood, and without consciously deciding to escape, I crawled behind a tree and hid. I didn't realize it at that moment, but I was free. When the long column of people had passed, I looked about me and saw the outline of some houses not too far. It was almost dark, there was a blackout and I was trembling with fear. I approached the nearest house and knocked hesitantly on the door. As it turned out, most of the Germans had escaped the village and the man who opened the door and pulled me in was one of eight Italians who had worked for the Germans as forced laborers. He and his companions made me sit down and brought me something to eat, I can still remember the taste of warm sweet porridge cooked in milk, it was heavenly. They brought me some clothes which they found in the house, a basin of hot water, soap and a towel and I had my first good wash in months. I felt like a newborn person, as I threw away my lice–ridden clothes and with that everything that reminded me of the camp. Shortly afterwards another two girls found their way to us, my saviors picked them up outside and took them in. They had seen us walking past, but didn't know where we came from. After we told them about the camp they couldn't do enough for us. In the end we became a small group of girls who had succeeded in their escape from the death march. Actually we were not the only people on the run, the Germans were fleeing from the Russians towards the west, and the road became more and more congested every day, but we didn't see any more people from Stutthof. Meanwhile we had a warm place, enough to eat and were well looked after by our hosts, life was good again.

After a few days some Germans came around checking up on the Italians, they had no idea who we were, but they told us to leave. The next morning we said good–bye to our friends and started walking. We had warm clothes now, but still it was the middle of winter and freezing cold. we wandered about aimlessly without knowing where to go. Most of the houses in the village were abandoned, but even if there was anybody inside, they wouldn't open the door. We became more and more exhausted, it was too cold to sit down anywhere in the open, and all the places were closed to us. We were free, but at the same time homeless. When dusk fell we became desperate, we knew that we couldn't survive a night outdoors, we were hungry and thirsty, so we decided to return. Our Italian friends took us in again without a word, and for the next few days we felt safe.

One morning I woke up with a high fever. After trying all kinds of home remedies to no avail, one of our hosts put me on a horse–drawn cart and took

me to a first aid station somewhere near. He was told to leave me there and I was examined by a young doctor in military uniform. Under normal circumstances I would have been dead scared, but I was too sick to care. Since he didn't know what was the matter with me, he sent me to a hospital in Danzig with the next ambulance. Together with me were other sick people, some were wounded Germans, but nobody asked me anything, I was apparently just another German refugee.

When we arrived at the hospital I was diagnosed with Typhus and sent immediately to the isolation ward. After that everything becomes hazy, I remember dreaming of Vienna and going home again, but the most persistent dream was opening the drawer next to my bed and finding oranges there. I was delirious for almost three weeks and when I woke up I found myself in a room together with another five women, one of them a guard from Stutthof. I don't know what happened, whether I ever said anything about my true identity during my unconscious state, but I don't think so. Everybody was very kind to me, the hospital staff as well as the other patients, they all felt sorry for me because I had no visitors. I had concocted a story when I woke up, and since my language was German, everybody believed me. I said I came from Vienna (my accent gave me away) and that I had been sent to work in East Germany. When the Russians came I fled together with many other people and had lost all my belongings as well as my documents. I told them that I was worried about my family back in Vienna and because of the war I had no way of getting there, and that I had nowhere to go after my release from the hospital. That story went down well, I even received some invitations, one of them I accepted later.

I was very fortunate to become ill only after leaving the camp, there was no way I could have survived this terrible disease without treatment, nobody in the camp did. Even with the wonderful care I received, I was very weak, and weighed only thirty nine kilos upon my release.

The last two weeks we all went down to the shelters. Danzig was under attack by air as well as by land, we could hear the bombs falling and the shelling of artillery. The shelters were fully equipped and very comfortable and I was reluctant to leave, but I had fully recovered. I had been in the hospital for over six weeks, I felt safe there and I was afraid of what I would find outside. Before I left, the other patients collected some clothes and money for me, they knew I had no family and wanted to help me. I was very touched, I had forgotten they were Germans, since I joined them they were not the enemy anymore. It is difficult to explain, but I felt like two different people, one the Jewish girl who had to hide her identity in order to survive, the other a German refugee

When I left the hospital it was April and spring had come. One of the other patients, who had left the week before, made me promise to come and stay with her. She was an elderly woman and very nice, and since I had nowhere to go, I

accepted gladly. She lived in Danzig, not too far from the hospital, but when I tried to find my way to her, it was not so simple. The city was under siege, the streets were practically deserted, and there was nobody to ask the way. I wandered around in the general direction that was given me and to my relief found the apartment building where my friend lived. She was genuinely glad to see me, she had no family and was very lonely. The trouble was that all the tenants were living in the shelters, and I wasn't alone with her, there were quite a number of people. It wouldn't have bothered me too much, after all I had lived under much worse conditions, but the bombs were falling all around us. At first I was just glad to have a place to stay, but then I asked myself whether I had survived only to be killed by a Russian bomb, and I decided to take a chance and leave. I stayed three days, then I thanked my friend for her kindness, after all she had taken me in and shared with me the little food she had. She couldn't understand why I was leaving, for her it was home, but to me it was just another unsafe place, and it was time to move on. She lived near a railway station, so I made my way there and hung around, together with a few people, waiting for a train. The city was burning, it was only a matter of time when the Russians were coming, and there was no proper train service. However my luck held, and after a few hours a train stopped and everybody got on. Nobody knew or cared where we were going, the main thing was to get away. It was a very erratic journey. We stopped and started many times, often the lines were blown up and the train had to make detours, our progress was extremely slow. We spent the night on the train, the next day we finally stopped in the middle of nowhere, the engine had run out of coal. We got out and started walking through a forest. Wherever we went artillery shells were falling and many people got hurt by flying splinters from the trees. The wood was full of German soldiers and maybe the Russians knew it, otherwise why shoot into a forest? After a few hours we arrived at Pasewalk, the village where I had stayed with the Italians.

I recognized the name of the village, and through pure coincidence I ended up in the same place as before. Well, almost the same place, the Italians, plus a group of German refugees, occupied now an enormous cow shed. The house, were I had stayed for a short while, had been bombed and was unfit to live in. My friends were happy to see me again, they wanted to hear what had happened to me and made me very welcome. I felt so sorry when I found out one of them was missing, he had died of Typhus, which he certainly caught from one of us.

They understood perfectly well that I had to stay with the Germans for my own protection, but we often talked. I attached myself to a woman with four children, she was very grateful for my help and in return she shared some of her food with me. After a while all the Germans (I was now officially a "German Refugee") were evacuated from there. I said good–bye to my Italian friends

who had been so good to me and thanked them for saving my life, and started off on my new journey.

We were taken to the shores of a river and put on boats. From then on I spent the next few weeks sailing around the Baltic sea, which would have been very interesting in peacetime, but we were continually shot at and bombed. Once my ship even got a direct hit from a torpedo, but most of us were rescued and taken ashore. One of the ships I sailed on had wounded German soldiers and tried to land in Denmark, but were refused permission. My journey ended in May in Flensburg, which is in North Germany, and there on my last ship I heard on the radio the announcement that Germany had surrendered. I was the happiest person in the world, but I had to hide it, all around me the Germans were crying and wondering what would happen to them now. Although I had lived among them and made friends, I still was afraid to trust them with my secret.

For the next few days nothing much happened, we remained aboard ship since we had nowhere to go. Then the British army arrived and set up a military government in the town. Full of trepidation I left the ship which had been my home for the last days of the war, and made my way to the building where the British were stationed. At first they wouldn't let me in, but I insisted on speaking to someone in charge, and finally an interpreter came to the gate and asked me what I wanted. When I started telling him my story, he looked at me as if I had fallen out of the sky, but he took me inside and listened to me. It turned out that he was a German Jew, serving in the British Army, and although he knew a little about the fate of the Jews in Germany, he was in shock. He took me to his superior and translated everything I had told him, and when I showed them the number on my arm (which I had always kept covered with a Band–Aid), they just stared at it, that was the first time they had seen it. Then they asked me how they could help me, but I didn't really know. I had no idea if there were any Jews left alive, I had no home to go to, and in any case traveling was not possible in the first days after the war.

Finally it was decided that I would remain in Flensburg until an opportunity arose for me to leave. The interpreter took charge and rented a room for me in an apartment that belonged to a German family, he gave me some money, ration cards and vouchers for a canteen where I could get my meals. I returned to the ship to say good–bye and to collect my few belongings which I had accumulated over the past weeks.

Now I was truly alone. Up to now I had always been together with people, I had made friends and we looked after each other, even if they were Germans. I was never completely at ease with them, there was always the fear of giving myself away. I know that fear was irrational, they completely accepted me, and in any case they had other things to worry about. During those times I met many interesting people, some I remember very well, although their names

escape me. Two Germans in particular I felt very comfortable with, and only my instinct for self preservation prevented me from confiding in them. One was a young officer whom I met in the cow shed in Pasewalk. We started talking and found we had a lot in common. He came from Munich, had a similar cultural background, and we spent a whole day discussing books and music, forgetting the war for a while. We only spent that one day together, surrounded by a crowd of people, but I have never forgotten him. The other person was a sailor on my last ship, he was looking after our group of refugees. He too came from a big city, he was a genuine Berliner. He was not afraid to speak his mind, which still posed a certain risk although the end was near, he was always cheerful and tried to dispel our worries. I often had the feeling that he sensed something about me, he became my friend and protector. We had long talks and I was often on the verge of telling him who I was, but at the last minute something always held me back. The one German who left the deepest impression on me was one of the doctors who looked after me in the hospital in Danzig. She seemed to know where I came from, although no mention was ever made of it. She as well as the nurses must have seen my tattoo, but I don't know whether it meant anything to them. She often came to visit me, I always had the feeling that she showed a special interest in me, and her kindness and compassion helped me a great deal on my way to recovery.

When I had pictured the end of the war I saw myself celebrating my freedom, surrounded by family and friends. The reality was completely different. First of all I had been free for the last few months, caught up in a war where I lived with my enemies and wished for our attackers to win. Now I lived in a German home, went to eat in a German canteen (it was really a soup kitchen), took out books from a library and spent my time reading. I spoke to very few people and was terribly lonely. My only link was the interpreter who promised to help me get to Vienna at the first opportunity. I still had hopes that somebody had survived.

At that time it was almost impossible to get any information about the fate of my family. I thought the first person any of us would get in touch with would be my aunt Martha, I hoped that being married to a Gentile she and her children would be spared. My assumption proved to be correct, although it took a long time till I found out since there was no mail going anywhere. Then I met a man from Yugoslavia, an ex–prisoner, who happened to live in the same building. He too was hoping for some transportation to go home and he wanted to get to Eckernforde, where he knew of a camp for Yugoslav prisoners waiting to be repatriated. One day at the end of May, he came with the good news that a truck with British soldiers would be going there the next day and they were willing to take us. I really didn't care where I was going, as long as I could move. I had been in Flensburg only a short time, but it felt much longer, altogether those few months since I got away from the camp seemed like years,

and I left that place gladly.

The truck took us right to the camp and I was introduced to the director, who happened to be Jewish. At first he was a little suspicious when I told him about myself but after some questions he was satisfied that I was telling the truth. He then told me the most amazing story. Apparently a boat full of evacuees from Stutthof had been hit and tried to land in Eckernforde towards the end of the war. Many people were wounded or sick, and one of the town's leading citizens, a Count Moltke, rescued them. For many of them it was too late, some died of wounds, some of diseases, and sadly, a few died after the war of TB. The survivors were all still in Eckernforde, recuperating in a sanitarium, and when I wanted to rush off to see them, he persuaded me to wait for his friend, one of the survivors, who he was expecting that same day. I found it very difficult to wait, I was so stunned by what I had heard, happy to know that some people had made it and sad that so many didn't. When the director's friend Mr. Kaplan finally arrived, I was so excited, I begged him to take me right away to the sanitarium, I apologized to the director and thanked him, and we set off. I wish I had words to describe my arrival, I felt that I had come home, it was a wonderful feeling to be with my own people again. Everybody crowded around me and we talked and talked, telling each other our stories. One of the girls turned out to be from Vienna, and we found we were schoolmates. It was overwhelming, I was so happy, for the first time in ages I could relax and be myself, I moved in straight away and stayed there, ready to begin a new life.

Eckernforde was a pretty seaside town and the sanitarium we lived in was quite luxurious, but when most of the people had recovered sufficiently we moved into a beautiful villa which had been taken away from a Nazi bigshot. We had a cook and a maid, both Germans who must have resented us but were glad of a job, and all our needs were being met by the British military government of the town. They even made German shop owners provide us with clothes and anything else we needed.

The situation for the Germans was desperate, there was very little food, everything was rationed, public transport was erratic and most of the cities were destroyed, but we lived like human beings again. Our food was supplemented by Red Cross parcels, we were well dressed and had everything we needed. One thing bothered us though, our hair had begun to fall out as a result of having been sick with Typhus. We overcame that obstacle by tying scarves in the most imaginary ways, and when my hair grew back it looked much better than before, but that took a few months.

Most of us in the house were women and young girls, gradually some men joined us, two of the women had found their husbands and they moved in. All of us were looking for our lost families, but it took a long time till things got organized and lists of survivors came out. The UNRRA tried their best to help,

they set up DP camps all over Germany, and slowly some people found each other. We started to venture out of Eckernforde, mostly to visit DP camps, and when we saw the conditions under which other survivors lived, especially the former concentration camp Bergen Belsen, we counted ourselves very lucky not to have to live in such misery. The search for any surviving members of my family proved fruitless. Eventually I found out what had happened to my mother and sister, they had been sent to work on a farm, but Evy came down with Typhus and they were both sent back to Stutthof. Evy was sent to the gas chambers, but nobody knew how my mother died. To be honest, even knowing what happened to them didn't change much, deep in my heart I knew I had lost them long ago. I accepted now that I was all alone in the world and I had to get on with my life.

Travel in the beginning was difficult, when we wanted to go somewhere we usually hitched a ride with one of our English friends who had the use of a jeep or a car. There were quite a number of Jewish soldiers stationed in the town and they became regular visitors. We celebrated all the Jewish holidays together, and to them it was a home away from home. One of our guests was Frank, the town interpreter. He was a German Jew who had been lucky enough to get to England in time and to join the British army. He was our liaison with the military government and he made sure that we were well looked after. Soon he became my boyfriend, I never thought of myself as particularly good–looking, but I must have been attractive, even without hair.

I remained in Eckernforde for about a year. It was a time of adjustment from the horrors of the war to a life of freedom, there was sadness at everything I had lost, and happiness that in spite of everything I had survived. I had lots of friends, I had a good relationship with Frank, I went to parties and enjoyed myself, the past I tried to push out of my mind. With the Germans I had very little contact, which suited me. I never felt any hatred for them, maybe because I had lived as one of them for a while, but that was over and I wanted nothing to do with them.

For many years I didn't want to hear or speak German, and much later when I met some German tourists I had no desire to talk to them, until I met and became friendly with a couple from Hamburg. From then on my ambiguous feelings towards the Germans changed. I could never forgive them for what they did to us, but I forgave myself for making friends with them while living amongst them. Hiding my identity was necessary for my survival, but I felt that I should not have become so close to some of them. Now I am at peace with myself, I even went to Germany for a visit in 1973. I read and speak my mother tongue again and enjoy watching German TV.

Eckernforde is not far from Hamburg, and one day my friend Ganya and I went there to visit friends in Blankenese, a DP camp for children, (mostly teenagers, very few smaller children having survived). We arrived by train and

had to stay overnight in Hamburg, near the railway station we found a little hotel and checked in. We noticed that there were strange people hanging about but didn't pay attention. During the night we were awakened by loud noises and banging at our door, it was the police asking us for identity papers. We were terrified, the memory of the camps was still raw, but they explained to us that not knowing the area, we had stumbled into a place that doubled as a brothel After that adventure we decided to be more careful, and to stay only with people we knew. After Blankenese we visited another camp in the vicinity, where I met Zdenek the camp director, who told me that he would soon be going home to Czechoslovakia. I asked him whether he could take a letter to my aunt (by that time I had been in contact with her and knew that her family had survived), as the mail was still very unreliable. He said that he would be delighted and since he was coming within the next few days to Eckernforde, he would pick it up. When I got back I wrote a long letter, and sure enough he came, but instead of taking my letter, he proposed that I go with him to visit my family. It was an offer I couldn't refuse. He had a car and a driver (being a camp director he was a VIP) and we traveled in style. It took us three days to get to Czechoslovakia, the nights we spent at country inns. I was a little naive, I had thought at first he did it only out of the goodness of his heart, but he had other designs on me. He told me he had fallen in love with me at first sight and wanted to marry me. He was divorced, over thirty and very attractive, I was not really in love with Frank, so I started an affair with him. As for marrying him, I had no intention to marry anyone at this point in my life. Traveling through Germany was an interesting experience. I saw the destruction of large parts of most of the big cities as well as the beautiful countryside of South Germany. After we crossed the border we went first to Zdenek's parents home, where he introduced me as his fiancee. They were very kind to me and treated me as one of the family, but I was very impatient to get to Znaim. My arrival was a complete surprise to all of them, my aunt Martha, uncle Albert, and my cousins Kitty and Kurt. We laughed and we cried, it was a wonderful reunion, although tinged with sadness when we remembered the rest of the family who hadn't survived.

We poured over piles of photos, remembering happier times. Since I had nothing left of the family, my aunt gave me as many pictures as I wanted. My mother had left with her two rings and a gold watch for safekeeping and she was very glad to be able to give it to me. I stayed in Znaim for almost a month, by that time Zdenek had finished his business in Czechoslovakia and he came to fetch me. Before we left he asked the family to put in a good word for him and to persuade me to marry him, which they actually tried, they really liked him. So did I, but not enough to get married and I liked my freedom too much to get tied down. With sadness I said good–bye to them all and went back to Eckernforde. It was great staying with the family, they wanted me to remain

with them, but I couldn't see any future for me there. I wanted to go to Palestine to start a new life. The truth was I only felt comfortable with other Jews at that time.

I was very glad to be with my friends again, we had become very close since my first arrival in Eckernforde. My relationship with Frank ended when I told him about Zdenek, he was very hurt. Then I met a new arrival in town who had become a constant visitor while I was away. His name was Leslie and he was one of the Jewish soldiers who spent all their free hours with us. We both fell in love, but now I had to get out of my involvement with Zdenek, which proved very difficult. He kept coming to visit and wouldn't take no for an answer, he had become so possessive that it frightened me. I didn't know what to do, until one day he just vanished. He did write to me though, apparently he was caught dealing on the black market, and had to leave in a hurry. He promised he would come back for me, but to my relief I never saw him again. The next few months I was really happy. My relationship with Leslie was great, we had wonderful times together, and I didn't give too much thought about the past or the future, I just lived from day to day. Leslie had a brilliant mind, he spoke six languages and could talk about anything under the sun. I learned a lot from him, but I was very much aware of my lack of education, although he never made me feel inferior. Both he and my friend Ganya, who was older than me and had been a pianist before the war, had a very good influence over me, thanks to them I read even more, learned a little about music and took lessons in literature from a German teacher. The time passed pleasantly, but we knew that we would have to move on soon. All of us had a goal in mind, some wanted to go to America, two of the girls married British soldiers and went to England, the rest of us had their heart set on Palestine. Leslie and I discussed marriage, but he was not sure about what he wanted to do with himself, and I could not see myself living in England. Meanwhile emissaries from Palestine came to visit and told us about the various places in Germany that had been set up as training centers for people who wanted to go to Palestine.

Since Leslie was soon to be transferred to another town, I was determined to leave before him. I didn't want to be left behind, but going to a new place with different people made parting a little easier. It was hard leaving most of my friends, but a few came with me, and we were all looking forward to our first step on the way to Palestine.

We traveled to Gersfeld by Fulda, in the south of Germany, not far from Frankfurt. The house and the extensive grounds were a former training center for Hitler youth, and now it belonged to us, which gave us great satisfaction. It was a beautiful place, we were about eighty young people from various parts of Europe and all with the same dream. It was called Kibbutz Gersfeld and was run the same way as a Kibbutz, we had a communal kitchen and dining room, we worked in the gardens to learn a little about agriculture, had Hebrew lessons

and lectures about Palestine. We didn't overwork ourselves, we always had plenty of strength left to sing and dance after work. We didn't learn too much Hebrew either, we were quite lazy, the only Hebrew that stuck in our minds were the words of the songs we learned.

In those days I didn't think or talk about the past, all I wanted was to forget. Now I waited impatiently for the next step in my journey, as much as I liked it in Gersfeld, I wanted to move on. Finally, after a few months, in the fall of 1946, we boarded trucks and started off for the Belgian border. In those days there was no legal way of reaching Palestine, so wherever it was possible the borders were crossed. I have no idea how it worked, but the various countries must have cooperated, we certainly were not invisible. Our column of trucks was quite long, we had been joined by another Kibbutz, and when we reached the border we were stopped. Long negotiations followed while we were sitting and waiting, and finally we had to turn around, we were not permitted to enter Belgium. We were on the road for three days, eating and sleeping on the trucks, making our way back to Gersfeld, when something terrible happened. On one of our stops, when we all jumped down to stretch our legs, the truck behind us started rolling forward and crushed one of our friends right in front of our eyes. We were all in shock, he was just twenty years old, he had survived the war only to die so pointlessly, because of some failing brakes.

We returned to Gersfeld in a somber mood, all our enthusiasm was gone. Listlessly we went back to our usual activities, but it took a while before we could forget. We were now very impatient to leave Germany and fortunately we didn't have to wait long. Again we boarded trucks, this time we traveled to the Austrian border where we crossed without any problems and arrived in Vorarlberg, close to the Italian border. We spent the night in relative comfort in some dormitory, and the next day we started climbing the Alps. We had to leave most of our possessions behind, all we were allowed were small rucksacks on our backs, and slugging through the snow, we crossed into Italy by night.

The climb over the mountain was not easy, it was dark, we couldn't really see where we were going and we sank deep into the snow with every step. Although I was in good physical condition I was exhausted, but it was worth it, we had arrived in Italy. We were taken to an enormous barn filled with hay, to rest and await some transport to our next destination. After spending endless hours there, covered in dust, our throats burning, the trucks finally came and took us to Milan, but not before stopping at Lake Como, so that we could clean up, we all looked like scarecrows and needed it badly. My heart lifted at the sight of this beautiful place, and I plunged in to wash away the dirt and the dust. We remained there for a while, it was much too short, but it revived my spirit. In the evening we entered Milan and stayed there for two days. We slept in a DP camp, but went sightseeing during the day. I was so happy to be out of

Germany, that even postwar Italy seemed like paradise to me.

The next few months I spent in a DP camp in Rivoli, a small place near Torino. It was now the winter of 1946/47 and being in the north, it was very cold. We slept in barracks again, but we had plenty of room, and of course we were free to go wherever we wanted. We ate in a communal dining room where the food was adequate, and we supplemented it with fruit and fresh vegetables that we bought in town. We had no money, but we received cartons of cigarettes from the UNRRA and sold them on the black market. Cigarettes fetched a high price, especially American ones, and I felt rich, because I got double rations. Soon after our arrival the UNRRA office in our camp was looking for somebody who could read and write English and I volunteered, although I didn't know much. Apparently it was enough and I got the job, but instead of payment I received extra cigarette rations. I loved my job, I met interesting people who worked for UNRRA, it was quite an international crowd, and the common language being English, I learned fast. My favorite pastime was going to the cinema, in Rivoli they changed the movies every day, they were dubbed in Italian and after a while I learned enough to understand. Sometimes I also went to Torino for the evening with friends. Postwar Italy was still poor, but was slowly returning to normal and Torino was a lovely city even then.

Now I must mention something that may not seem important, but now that I had a job and was going out in the evenings I liked to be well dressed. Every time I had accumulated a few possessions I had to leave them behind, so when I came to Italy I had very little. That's where the Joint Distribution Committee came to the rescue, they collected clothes from everywhere and brought them to us. I was not fussy, I didn't mind accepting used clothes, I received often very beautiful things. it was very difficult to buy clothes after the war and I was not rich enough to buy on the black market, even with my extra cigarettes.

When spring came we finally left Rivoli. It had been a good period in my life, I felt I had done something worthwhile, had learned some English and some Italian and had made good use of my time.

Once again we were on the move, this time to Ladispoli, a sea side resort not far from Rome. We lived in a very pleasant hotel, right by the sea, it was a welcome change from life in the camp. I was so excited to see the Ocean and couldn't wait to go swimming although it was freezing. April in Europe can be pretty cold, but nothing could hold me back, it was exhilarating. I had sailed around the Baltic Sea, but had never put a foot in the water, and I'll always remember my first swim in the Ocean. We stayed in Ladispoli for six weeks and took advantage of the proximity to Rome to see as much as possible. We would take a train to the city and wander around, visiting all the famous places. We spent days in the Vatican, we had plenty of time and what better way to use it than seeing all the wonders that Rome had to offer. In those days there were

few tourists, but we were always on the lookout for groups so we could join them and listen to the explanations of the guides. We walked all over Rome, I am sure we saw more of it than any tourist, the seven months I spent in Italy made me fall in love with this beautiful country. I am sorry I never had the opportunity to go back there after the war.

During all that time we were taken care of by emissaries from Palestine, they made all the decisions for us, where to send us and when, and up to a certain point it made life very easy for us. Most people had no personal contact with them, but I got to know some of them through my work in the office, and I began to notice a pattern that would repeat itself over the next few years. They were kind to me, but I often felt patronized, as if I wasn't quite in the same class. I never had that feeling with the UNRRA staff I worked with. There was one incident in Rivoli that brought it home to me, one day two officials came to the camp for an inspection and while I was showing them around the office they invited me for lunch. I gladly accepted and they took me by car to a beautiful restaurant in Torino where I had a lovely meal, but more than anything I remember the feeling of being treated like a guest and not an inmate of a camp. When I returned to the office after lunch, Arie, the manager of the camp who had hardly ever said a word to me, asked to speak to me. He pointed out that I had no right to accept the invitation for lunch and that I shouldn't think that I was better than anybody else. I was so stunned, I didn't know what I had done to make him so angry, I could not say a word. Much later I realized that they looked down on us. I know they did a tremendous job bringing us all the way from country to country to our final destination, often at great risk to themselves, looking after our needs and I will always be grateful to them, but it is a fact that they didn't consider us as their equals. There was a lack of communication as well, they didn't know much about us and we didn't talk about the past, first of all we wanted to forget, and above all we were not asked too many questions. That same code of silence lasted for many years, until people started to tell about their experiences. In those days I wanted to be like everybody else, to be accepted and to lead a normal life, but it didn't happen overnight.

During that postwar time in Germany and later in Italy I formed some deep friendships that lasted for many years. Up to then I had never been long enough with people to become attached to them, I was always separated after a short period. As far as my love life was concerned, nothing much happened, I was still thinking of Leslie and missing him. Not that I was short on offers, I even had marriage proposals. Some people got married after a short acquaintance, more out of loneliness than love. I preferred to wait until I had reached my goal, I had this romantic notion that once I arrived in Palestine, I would find true love. It didn't quite work out that way, but I'll come to that later.

In May 1947 we traveled to our next and last stop in Italy, a small place

outside Bari. We spent two or three days there, waiting for a ship. All I remember is chaos and confusion, there was not enough room in the few houses put at our disposal, and our group ended up on a rooftop. It wasn't too bad during the day when the sun shone, but at night it was bitter cold, and the last day it rained. Finally the great moment arrived, the last leg of our journey was about to begin. Once again we had to leave most of our possessions behind, as there was very little room on the ship. In the middle of the night, in total darkness, we walked the short distance to the sea, there we lined up and were taken by rubber dinghy, a few at a time, to the ship which was anchored far out at sea. It was called "Mordei Hagettaot" (which means Ghetto Fighters) and it was no luxury liner. It was a small vessel and had been fitted out with three–tiered bunks to accommodate fourteen hundred people below deck. It was impossible to sit up, it was very crowded and the air was foul, there were only four toilets and no water to wash, even drinking water was scarce. We received a certain amount every day, it was strictly rationed and we were always thirsty. Food was no problem, the few of us who were not seasick, had more than enough to eat, most people couldn't eat at all. We had piles of iron rations, which consisted of tins of concentrated food, I ate so much of it I still remember the taste, it was actually quite good. I was already an old hand at sailing and was never sick, but it was terrible watching my friends suffer. They couldn't even crawl out of their bunks, while we, the healthy ones, spent our time on deck in the fresh air. We even tried to wash, we lowered buckets on ropes over the side to fill them with sea water, but it wasn't very successful, it was refreshing, but it gave us an itch. Still, nothing could dampen our spirits, for us it was a great adventure, at night we would sit under the stars and sing Hebrew songs, talking of the future and making plans.

When we reached the Greek islands we ran into a storm and the ship almost capsized, by that time the poor people who had been seasick became even worse, and there was nothing anybody could do for them. After we had been aboard ship for ten days we were not permitted on deck during daylight, as we were approaching Palestine, I don't know who was kidding who, the British must have known about us.

The next two days were hell, we had to stay in the hold and the stench was terrible, there was no air to breathe and all around me people were moaning. We were only allowed on deck at night, during the day British planes were flying over us, and on the twelfth day of our journey they discovered us. In a way it was a relief, we had known it would happen sooner or later. At that time all the illegal ships were caught, but since there was no other way into Palestine we had to try.

What followed then was rather bizarre. Three British battleships surrounded our pathetic little ship an officer with a bullhorn addressed us and ordered us to surrender By that time our ship's engines had stopped, the crew had vanished

(actually they had mingled with us) and everybody who could walk had streamed on deck. We shouted back that we would never give up and that we would fight to the end, of course we didn't mean it, we had no weapons. When the soldiers started to board our ship we pelted them with whatever came to hand, mostly our tins of concentrated food that were left over. Then it became serious, we were inundated with jets of cold water and tear gas and soon were powerless to prevent them from boarding. We were wet, our eyes were streaming and we couldn't see much for quite a while. When the air cleared everything was peaceful, the soldiers talked to us, passing out chocolates and cigarettes and everybody calmed down. For them it was a routine operation, it was obvious they had done this before. One of their ships took ours in tow and that's how we reached Palestine. When the beautiful skyline of Haifa appeared on the horizon we were overcome with emotion, it had taken us so long to get here and now we were not permitted to stay. We were taken off the ship and transferred to a British vessel. We had to go down into a large hold, but instead of a ceiling it had metal bars, it was like a cage. We were still shaken from the events of the last day, but after a while we settled down. We were allowed to go on deck where they had rigged up some showers, and after washing away the dirt of the last twelve days we felt much better. There is no denying it, we were sad, but we had known from the beginning that the chance of getting into Palestine was slim. We also knew that our destination was Cyprus, and that our stay would be a long one. There was a quota, every month a certain number of people were allowed into Palestine, and the camps in Cyprus were filled to capacity. I worked out that my turn would come in two and a half years, not a very cheerful thought.

The journey to the port of Famagusta took only a few hours, from there we were taken to what was called the summer camp, probably because of the flimsy tents we lived in. Each tent had four cots, later we acquired tables and some chairs. There was no electricity, we used kerosene lamps. The communal showers had mostly sea water, so we washed ourselves in the tent, using a washbasin. We were a small group of eight friends, five boys and three girls who shared two tents, for privacy we just hung blankets in the middle, which worked out very well.

Life in the camp was not too hard and after the initial shock of finding ourselves once more behind barbed wire, we settled in. We had very little to do with the British soldiers, they guarded us from the outside, but didn't interfere with the everyday running of the camp .We decided to run our group like a small kibbutz, to look after our own needs and to cook for ourselves. We divided out the various tasks and I volunteered to become the chef, it was better than doing the laundry or the cleaning. The youngest of the boys, Haskel, was assigned to me as my helper. It was great having somebody to order around, but he was very sweet about it, he didn't mind helping me. In the beginning my

meals couldn't have been very good, but with the assistance of an Hungarian girl from another group who was a great cook I did pretty well. The products we received were sufficient but not very exciting, so preparing interesting dishes became a challenge. Some people who had relatives outside sent them a little money and we could buy a few things to supplement our diet, of course we shared everything. Certain basic things were given to us, others we could buy, the rest we made ourselves. For cooking we had kerosene stoves, but we had no pots and pans, so the boys hammered them together using discarded food tins, furniture was made of crates and cartons were used for storage. We never threw anything away that could be made into something else and after a while we were quite comfortably settled. We often had visitors from Palestine who organized all kinds of activities for us and brought us presents that had been donated, like records and books. Our most prized possession was a gramophone (the wind–up kind of course), in the evenings we had Hebrew lessons, folk dancing and lectures, or if nothing was on the program we played cards or just sat around and talked.

Living in tents was not too bad in summer although it was hot, but winter was awful. When it rained, and it rained a lot, everything turned into mud, even the ground inside the tent. To get out of bed without getting my feet wet became a major operation. The tent was dripping, the dampness penetrated everything and sometimes I felt that I would never be dry again. The worst things were the storms, often we had to hold onto the poles to keep the tent from flying away. What I hated most was the howling of the wind and being so exposed to the elements, with the tent offering little protection.

In the summer we were taken occasionally to the neighboring camp which was on the seashore and had a nice beach. We had to walk some distance, guarded by armed soldiers who had no idea who we were or why we were imprisoned. Whenever I had a chance I tried to talk to them and explain, they were eager to listen, they were just young boys serving in the army. Going to the beach was great, it was a real treat and a welcome change in our routine. We all tried to keep up our spirits as best we could, but after a while the imprisonment began to have an effect, all we wanted was to get out and be free.

While we were imprisoned the War of Independence broke out, and we began training to join the army on our arrival in Palestine. The exercises we did in the open air were in full view of our British guards, but when we learned about weapons we met in the communal hall. There I learned how to take apart and clean a gun and how to throw a hand grenade, that part of training I was not so keen on, but the physical exercises I loved . It was great fun climbing ropes and running, it was good for my body as well as for my spirit. Before that I had become ill, I am sure it was just out of despair, the long imprisonment had begun to tell on me. I had developed a persistent cough and the doctor sent me to the hospital in Nicosia for an X–ray. I went in an ambulance together with

another few sick people, we were looking forward to see something of the beautiful island, but alas there were no windows. Anyway it was a break in the routine and a nice outing. My X–rays didn't show anything and soon after I started exercising my cough miraculously disappeared.

We followed avidly the news, every evening we would gather around the loudspeaker in the public square and listen to the latest developments. By the end of the first year our hopes were rising that we wouldn't have to be there for the full term of two and a half years, and that we would be free soon. I felt fine again, I was very busy with my training and of course I was still cooking for my friends, who after surviving my learning period were quite happy with their chef. My spare time I spent with my friend Fruma who worked as a nurse in the camp clinic. I had always been fascinated by medicine, like my father I had dreamed of becoming a doctor, but unlike my father I never realized that dream. I liked to share the night shift with her, it was usually quiet and she taught me the names of all the medicines and what to use them for. That knowledge came in very handy later when I joined the army.

Our camp was bursting at the seams, ships were intercepted by the British non stop, and one day we met for the first time Jews from Morocco. We were very curious to get to know them, but we had no language in common. They spoke only French and Arabic, our common language was German, very few people knew French. That's where Joseph came to our rescue, he was a beautiful boy, just as curious about us as we about them and he spoke English. He attached himself to our group and spent most of his time with us. We were fascinated by his tales about Casablanca where he came from, and he wanted to know all about Europe. Most of us had picked up some English, so we had no problem communicating.

One day we received notice that two famous artists would come to our camp to perform, and that's when I first saw and fell in love with Shoshana Damari. She was beautiful and I will always remember the way she sang, since then I have retained a soft spot for her in my heart.

In May 1948 the State of Israel was declared and we could finally go home, although it took another two months till my turn came. The last two months on Cyprus were hard to bear. We knew it was only a matter of weeks before we were allowed to leave, but we were running out of patience. Finally, on July 6, 1948 my turn came. We boarded a ship, the Pan York (the same ship that had brought in a group of people from Rumania some months before), and sailed to our homeland. What a difference this was from our previous journey! It took only a few hours, we were comfortable and not crowded, we were looking forward to a new beginning and all of us were full of hope. It was wonderful to see Haifa on the horizon, this time we knew we were here to stay. After our arrival we were processed in the usual way, registered and sprayed with DDT, by that time we were so used to being deloused, it didn't even bother us any

more. My first night I spent in a refugee camp near Ra'anana, where we had arrived after a journey by train and truck. I had no intention of staying in a camp again, and the next morning I sneaked out. I wanted to get to Netanya, where my uncle Hans lived with his wife and child. Hans was the only one of my mother's family who had managed to escape, when the Germans marched into Czechoslovakia he ran away and made his way to Palestine.

Well, there I stood on the road feeling very adventurous and enjoying my freedom. The fact that I had no money and no idea in which direction to go didn't faze me at all, I felt wonderful. My only option was to hitchhike, but I didn't have to wait long, a truck stopped and gave me a lift to Netanya. When I arrived at my uncle's house they were very surprised, but invited me to stay with them for a while. Hans went with me to the camp to release me and pick up my meager belongings, then we went home, this time on a bus. Hans, Jenny and their two year old daughter Ilana lived in a tiny rented apartment overlooking the sea. I was so happy to be with family again and living in a home, although it was very crowded. The first day I wandered around the town, went swimming in the sea and in the evening we went to the Cinema. I still remember the movie, it was Gilda, with Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford. It was a wonderful day.

Hans was working as a diamond cutter and making a good living, but I didn't want to be a burden, so on the third day I went to the labor exchange to look for a job. I was prepared to do anything, so they sent me to work on a farm near Netanya. It was a private farm and the family it belonged to was very nice. Since it was a temporary job I was paid at the end of every day. After a few days I went shopping and bought myself some clothes and had a haircut. When I came home full of excitement, showing my purchases, I was met with severe disapproval. Jenny lectured me about saving money, she couldn't understand what it meant to me to have earned my own money and to buy things with it. I don't know what I had expected from them, but they were not very interested in what had happened to me, after a few perfunctory questions all they did was giving me advise how to live my life. I was very disappointed, but I suppose they could not help it, maybe I had expected too much. In any case I felt that I had to get away and be on my own, so the next day I took a bus to Tel Aviv to visit my friend Fruma.

Before we had left Cyprus we had exchanged addresses, she was going to stay with her aunt in the center of town. I was terribly excited seeing Tel Aviv for the first time, I had pictured it so often in my mind, I could hardly believe that I was actually there. When I arrived at the apartment Fruma was very happy to see me, we couldn't stop talking about our first experiences. I spent the night there and the next morning I asked Fruma to help me find a job and a place to live in Tel Aviv. Fruma told me that there was a job open, but she didn't think it was suitable for me. She was working at the time in a famous

cake shop, Kapulski's, and she told me that her boss, who was managing the place, was looking for a maid. I explained to her that I didn't care what I did, as long as I could stay in Tel Aviv. The only problem was where to stay. Reluctantly she introduced me to her boss, who hired me straight away. She must have been really desperate, she took me without knowing anything about me. When she found out I had nowhere to live, she said I could stay with them. They didn't have a spare room, only a closed–in balcony with a folding bed. That was good enough for me, I went back to Netanya to say good–bye and to fetch my things, and moved into my new home. The family consisted of my boss, her husband and her two sons. The older boy was in the Army and the younger son was still in school. At that time I still could not speak Hebrew, so it was very convenient that the family spoke German, they had come from Germany many years before. The apartment was filled with beautiful things, Persian carpets, good furniture, lovely dishes and lots of books. I was treated like one of the family and had the house to myself during the day while everyone worked. During the summer vacation the younger boy stayed home and helped me with the housework. I don't think his parents would have approved of it, but he insisted and we kept it a secret. I think he was a little in love with me, he was a very sweet boy. I didn't find the work too hard, although I had to do all the cleaning, cooking and washing. I appreciated having a roof over my head and a job. The best thing was the food, the refrigerator was always filled with good things to eat, especially Kapulski's cakes. Those delicious cakes used to vanish pretty fast, my little helper and I polished them off quickly. I think my boss must have been annoyed with me, but she was satisfied with my work and didn't say anything. My free time I spent mostly with Fruma, we went for long walks exploring Tel Aviv, sometimes we went to the Cinema and occasionally we saw friends from Cyprus. Some of them were already in the Army, so I thought the time had come for me to join as well. I had never intended to make a career of being a maid, but it was a useful experience. I gave notice and thanked them for letting me share their home. They were sorry to see me go, (if only for the reason to have to look for another maid), but the Army came first.

Before I went to the recruiting office I decided to visit my family in Netanya. Hans had joined the Army in the meantime and he suggested that I should join his unit. He was working as a cook on an Army base near Netanya and he knew many people there. In those days everything was very informal, he arranged for me to meet the sergeant in charge of the company clinic, he had told him that I had worked as a nurse in Cyprus. At first I didn't think it was such a bright idea, but I had nothing to lose, so I went to the meeting. The sergeant, who was a male nurse, asked me a few questions and thanks to Fruma and the time I spent with her in the clinic in Cyprus I could answer everyone of them. That's how I joint the Medical Corps and became an Army nurse. It was

all so simple, no basic training, I received a uniform and started to work. I learned while on the job and things went smoothly, I think I became a reasonably good nurse. It was not very difficult, mostly it was dispensing pills for upset stomachs and dressing of wounds. For emergencies we had a doctor on the premises, and if we had a serious situation the patient was sent to hospital. So even if I knew very little in the beginning, I couldn't do much harm. As pleasant as it was working in the clinic, living on the base was exactly the opposite. I shared a tent with a few girls, none of them spoke German. I had picked up some basic Hebrew by then, but I was still struggling. At work everybody helped me out, but in my free time I was very lonely. I saw Hans frequently, and sometimes I spent a weekend in Netanya with the family, but I never felt a sense of belonging. The young people looked down on us, the survivors, they were the new generation of Israelis and couldn't understand how we could have gone "like sheep to the slaughter" as they called it. In the beginning I probably would have been more comfortable in a group of other survivors, but in the long run I think it was better for me to be among Israelis.

I remained there for a few months, then something happened that shook me. Hans told me he was in love with me and wanted me to live with him. I had not seen it coming, although he was only a few years older than me (he was my mother's youngest brother) and very handsome. To me he was my uncle and I couldn't see him in a different light. All I could think about was getting away from him, so I asked for a transfer to another place and I was sent to Tiberias. It was beautiful there and I was much happier. We were three nurses and a young woman doctor sharing a house in town, with a clinic in the same building. We lived right in the center overlooking the Sea of Galilee near the Scottish hospital where we had our meals. Our clinic treated all the girls who were stationed in various bases in and around Tiberias, and the work was very satisfying. The four of us got on extremely well and we had a busy social life. We went to parties and on trips to the surrounding country side, life was definitely getting better. The only thing that made me sad was when the others went home for weekends and I had nowhere to go. One of the other nurses, who became a close friend, invited me a few times to come home with her to Tel Aviv. It was very sweet of her and I went once. Her parents were very nice to me, but I didn't go again, it only made me more aware of the loss of my own family.

One day, while having lunch in the dining room, a young soldier started talking to me and invited me to a party. His name was Nechemia and he worked at the hospital as a physiotherapist. He came from Jerusalem and had fought in the war before being sent to Tiberias. We started going out together and after a few weeks when he went on leave he invited me to come with him. I didn't go at that time, but when he returned he told me that he had asked for a transfer to Jerusalem to be near his mother and brother, and he asked me to

come as well, he wanted me to be near him. He didn't say anything about the future and I didn't give it much thought either. I was always prepared for a change, so I applied for a transfer and left Tiberias. It had been a good period for me and I was sad to leave my friends, but I was looking forward to live in Jerusalem.

I was assigned to work in a convalescent home for wounded soldiers, and I shared my living quarters with another few nurses. The house we lived in was in Katamon, it was a very luxurious building which had been abandoned by an Arab family who had lived there before the War of Independence. By the time I arrived in Jerusalem the fighting was over, but the city had still not recovered. Food was rationed(and remained so for a long time), water was scarce, the city had an antiquated system where the water was brought in every ten days and the tanks on the roofs of the houses were being filled. We learned very quickly to save water, a shower was a real luxury, not to mention a bath. It was ironic, we had the most elegant bathrooms in the house, but had to wash ourselves in a basin. For me all this was no hardship, I had experienced worse conditions, I found Jerusalem very exciting, and as soon as I had settled in, Nechemia was only too happy to show me his city. He had arrived a few days before me and had come to take me home to his family. I don't quite know how it happened, but they took it for granted that we would get married. We had never really discussed it, and I am not sure what I felt for him, but from then on everything happened very fast. I was very attracted to him, but I don't think I really loved him, but I desperately wanted a family and a home of my own and he was the first to offer me that. Although we were both still in the Army, we could get permission to live at home, since we worked in Jerusalem. The trouble was that we couldn't afford to buy even the smallest apartment and there were very few places for rent, so we decided to live for the time being with his family after being married. He lived with his mother and brother Arie in a three room apartment in a religious neighborhood. The three of them lived in two rooms, the third room was occupied by a family of four, the kitchen and bathroom were shared by all. It was already crowded, even without me, but we were sure it would be only temporary.

The wedding took place at the end of May 1949 in the yard of the Rabbi of our neighborhood. I had nothing to do with the preparations and I agreed to everything that was suggested to me. I borrowed a dress from a friend and I got married in a modest ceremony. Most of the guests were strangers who I had never met before, I had very few friends to invite and although I had made peace with Hans, he and Jenny didn't come because they didn't approve of my marrying a poor man. They forgot that I was just as poor, which my new mother in law never let me forget. She thought that Nechemia could have done better than marrying a refugee without family connections. I tried not to let it bother me, I was used to being treated like a second class citizen.

My mother in law came from a very religious family who had lived for generations in the Old City of Jerusalem. At the end of World War I, she and her husband moved to South Africa with their first born son, Shalom. Nechemia's father was a Mohel and made a good living there. Another two boys were born to them and they were doing well, but then the father died after a short illness. My mother in law couldn't cope with the situation and returned to Jerusalem. She had not much education and was not qualified for any work, so her family cared for her. As soon as her son Shalom grew old enough she sent him to work and he supported the family until the other two boys were able to do the same. All three sons were very devoted and looked after her throughout her whole life. When Nechemia brought me home she treated me well, but she always made me feel that she had done me a favor by letting me stay there. Arie wasn't much better, but at least he had a good reason, because of me he had to share a room with his mother. I could have been quite happy with Nechemia, but we had no privacy and I never felt at home there. That doesn't mean that I was miserable, my life was not bad at all. After the Army I started to work in a candy store and Nechemia got a job in the Police department as a book keeper. He was very intelligent and capable, and he always took courses to improve himself. He had many friends and most of them accepted me readily. As for the rest – the people who were tactless and insensitive – I just disregarded them. I had built a wall around myself in order not to get hurt every time somebody made thoughtless remarks. I tried hard to become an Israeli, and although my Hebrew improved I never fitted in completely. Nechemia and his friends had grown up together and had so much in common while I was alone with my past. Essentially I remained an outsider.

After a few halfhearted attempts to find a place to live, Nechemia gave up and I resigned myself to stay with my mother in law. Then one evening while we were sitting in the living room (which served as our bedroom) I asked Arie very politely to leave the room so I could go to bed. He refused and pointed out that the apartment was not mine and that I was only a guest there. That was the last straw, I was terribly upset and told Nechemia that I was leaving the next day, he could either come with me or stay with his family. He tried to calm me down, but I was determined to go. Early the next morning I packed my few belongings and left for work. I had no idea where I would spend the night and whether Nechemia would come after me, but at that point I didn't care. He did come to the shop and tried to make me come back, but I was adamant. After work I went to a friend's home, I knew that her husband was in the reserves for a month, and asked her whether I could stay for a few days. She lived in a tiny one room apartment with her new baby, but she made me so welcome that I burst into tears. When Nechemia realized that I wasn't coming back, he went into action and within a week found a place to rent. It was a room on the roof of an old apartment building, with a small kitchen and bathroom. The room was

minuscule, 2 x 3 meters, but that was all we could afford. For me the size was immaterial, it was the first home I could call my own and I was happy. We took a small loan to buy some basic stuff, we had practically nothing. All we had were a few useless wedding presents and two sheets and blankets, Army issue. We bought a bed, a small second hand wardrobe, a kerosene cooking stove, some pots and a few dishes. Orange crates covered with pretty material served as furniture, and a colorful rug completed my new home. It was a great feeling to be free to do what I wanted. At the same time I got a new job as a sales girl in a fashion boutique which I loved. The pay was much better too, and gradually we could buy a few things and return our loan. I started to cook again (at my mother in law's I never did, she cooked for all of us), and now my training in Cyprus came in very handy. I often invited friends for dinner and introduced them to Viennese food. They loved my meals, although it wasn't always easy to find the ingredients, most products like meat, eggs and sugar were still rationed and vegetables and fruit were scarce. Every Saturday night we went to the cinema with our friends and afterwards for cake and coffee at the Atara Cafe, which later became a landmark of Jerusalem.

I was so busy adjusting to my new life, that in all that time I took very little interest in politics and what was going on around me. My main concern was having a baby, for me it was the most important thing and one of the reasons I got married. I was quite obsessed with the wish for a family of my own, to make up for my loss, but I couldn't fall pregnant. I went for all kinds of tests and treatments, some of them very unpleasant and painful, still nothing happened.

Then, one day in 1952, a terrible tragedy happened. My brother in law Shalom who was a police officer, was killed in a car accident while on duty. He left a wife and three children, the youngest only two years old. We were all devastated, he was a kind and generous person. He was the one who had persuaded Nechemia to work in the police and helped him get a job there, although Nechemia's dream was living and working on a farm. Now nothing stood in his way, certainly not me, I was only too ready to move again. I can't say the same for his mother and Arie, who tried to talk him out of it, to no avail. Soon after the mourning period was over we set out to find a place. We went to visit Kibbutzim and Moshavim (cooperative farms), wherever we went we were received with open arms, we met and talked to dozens of people, at that time they were all looking for new members. Some of those places we liked very much, but we couldn't make up our minds where to go, until we arrived on Moshav Habonim. It was an abandoned Arab village on the way to Haifa, settled primarily by English speaking people. It was a most romantic place, built on a hill overlooking the sea. We had arrived in the late afternoon, and when we saw the beautiful sunset both of us knew that our search was over. The people we met were all very nice and made us welcome, we told them that

we would let them know, but we had already made up our minds to join them. When we got back to Jerusalem I found out that I was pregnant. I had never really given up hope, but it still came as a lovely surprise. We wanted to move as soon as possible, but then I started to bleed and had to stay in bed if I didn't want to lose the baby, so we postponed our move. In the meantime we had received a letter from Habonim accepting us as new members.

The following period was very difficult, but I would have been prepared to do anything for a baby, so I accepted the situation. Since Nechemia had to work, I was left alone for most of the day. Luckily I had become very friendly with two of my neighbors who came in every day to look after me, which is more than Nechemia's family did. I spent the days reading and listening to the radio and waiting for the moment when I could get out of bed, when finally, after three months, I took my firsts steps outside. I was a little shaky, but it felt great to be on my feet again. The joy didn't last long. I started to bleed heavily and was taken to hospital where they tried to save the baby, but after two weeks I lost it. I was very ill and I had lost so much blood that I went into shock. I was unconscious for three days, nobody thought I would make it. My recovery was slow in the beginning, but the treatment was so good that I finally got well. The hospital was the old Sha'are Zedek on Jaffa road, it was an ancient building, but with a most devoted and caring staff who I am convinced saved my life. I was very sad at the loss of my baby, but it helped that I had something to look forward to, now at last we could move to Habonim. After six weeks in hospital I came home for the last time, to pack up, say good–bye to everybody and leave Jerusalem for good.

I loved Habonim from the beginning and felt completely at home there. It was a beautiful place and everybody made us so welcome, that within a short time we felt we belonged. I found many new friends, even a few people from Vienna, but most of the members came from South Africa. In those early days the living conditions were far from comfortable, but we were young and idealistic, and as far as I was concerned, I was certainly not spoiled and didn't care. We lived in a prefab at the bottom of the hill, without plumbing or running water, the only source was a tap outside and the toilets and communal showers were a few hundred meters away. In summer it wasn't so bad, but in winter it was no picnic trudging up the hill in wind and rain to have a shower. We had no electricity, the one generator served only the buildings that were used for storage, refrigeration and various offices. One small room was set aside for ironing, but hardly anybody used it. Most people wore crumpled clothes, I tried it too, but after a while I gave up and started ironing my clothes. That's how I became the best dressed woman on the Moshav. It wasn't difficult, everybody walked around in shorts and shirts, but mine were ironed. My first job was in the cow shed. Every morning at 4.00 a.m. the night watchman on duty woke me up, I quickly dressed, took my torch and ran to milk my ten cows. I loved

everything about my work, getting up early, coming from the cool night air into the warm cow shed and listening to the two guys who worked with me, singing while we sat on our little stools and milked. We had no machines then, all the milking was done by hand and I got to know each cow personally. The best thing about the job was that I finished my work when other people only started, and I had the rest of the day free.

On our days off we all went to the beach, usually by tractor (it was not too far, sometimes we walked). It was a beautiful and unspoiled beach then, with a lovely bay and a calm sea where we could swim. We were not lacking entertainment, we had plenty of parties, and movies once a week. In summer we sat outdoors, bringing our own chairs, in winter we had to take blankets as well, as our communal hall was not heated and it was freezing. We didn't mind though, we just dressed warmly. During intermissions (the reels had to be changed), all the people who had children dashed home to check on them. The most interesting event was the monthly general meeting, it was always very lively. I often longed to take part and voice my opinion, but I was too shy to open my mouth in front of a room full of people.

Meanwhile my sister in law Lea struggled to survive with her three children after the death of her husband. Two children were in school, but Leora was just two and a half years old and Lea couldn't afford full time help while she worked. Day care centers were practically nonexistent in those days, so Nechemia and I offered to take Leora to the Moshav and look after her for a few months, until Lea could get organized. I was given very little hope by the doctors that I would ever have a baby, so I was very happy to have Leora. She was a sweet little thing with bright red hair, easy to take care of, but very often sick. She adjusted well and liked the nursery school, (children from the age of a few months were looked after there during the morning, while the mothers worked). Women with children worked only part time, so they could be home in the afternoon. I continued with my work in the cow shed, Nechemia was at home till I returned at seven (a.m.) and after breakfast I took Leora to nursery school. That left me plenty of time to do my housework, so that I could sleep in the afternoon, after putting Leora to bed. During the first few months Lea came to visit quite often, but less and less as time went on. We took it for granted that Leora would stay with us.

Then, in the winter of 1953, the miracle happened, I was pregnant. I hadn't completely given up hope, still I was afraid that all the deprivation, the lack of food and vitamins during my growing years would have a negative effect on my body. I was overjoyed, but at the same time terrified that I would lose the baby again. I had to take it easy now, it was not possible for me to continue milking. The work was too hard, and there was always the danger of being kicked by a cow, which happened now and again. I can't quite remember where I worked in those days, over the years I had a number of jobs, some of them I liked very

much, others less so, but nothing compared with my first job. Soon after, all the milking was done by machines, it just wasn't the same anymore.

My pregnancy was easy, except for some morning sickness at the beginning I felt wonderful, and when summer came I even went swimming. After I overcame my initial fear I felt confident that this time everything would work out, and so it did. A little early, and to my great surprise three weeks before my due date, on September 3, 1953 my daughter Yael was born. I can't describe the feeling when I held her in my arms for the first time, I couldn't quite believe that she was mine. I had been trying to have a baby for three years, all that time wavering between hope and disappointment, now I knew it had all been worthwhile. I was the happiest person on earth.

At home life became very hectic. Within the short span of a few months I had become a mother to two children and I got very little sleep. Yael was small and she was always hungry, I had to feed her every two hours in the beginning, day and night. On top of that, Nechemia's family descended upon us as soon as I came out of the hospital, everybody wanted to see the baby. I never got any rest, but I was too happy to mind. Eventually we all settled down and things became easier. Meanwhile one of the old Arab houses on top of the hill became available and we moved in. It was a great improvement, we had more space and since all the main buildings were near, life was easier for me. One minor problem we had to contend with – mice, snakes and scorpions. They lived under the rocks surrounding the old houses and often invaded our homes. At that time new houses were being built for all the members, but it took another year until they were ready. It was great, moving into a brand new home, although even there we had no electricity and plumbing in the beginning. We had two rooms, a kitchen and a tiny bathroom, but to us it seemed like a palace.

On April 9, 1955 my second daughter Irit was born. Once again I experienced that wonderful feeling of holding my baby in my arms, there is nothing in the world equal to that. At the same time I was afraid to love my children so much, in the back of my mind there was always the fear of losing them. That fear, and the desire to protect them from all harm, remained with me for a long time. Gradually I overcame that fear and I tried to bring up the children as normal as possible without being overprotective.

My marriage to Nechemia was neither bad nor good. We lived quite amicably together, we didn't fight, but there was not much love left between us. I gave it very little thought, I was content with my life, until one day I fell in love and than I realized what I had been missing. I met Charles soon after he had returned from South Africa. He was divorced and his little boy had remained there with his ex–wife. I wasn't looking for an affair, but we were thrown together at every opportunity, and it just happened. When we realized how serious were our feelings, we tried to break it up. I had told Nechemia about it who was of course very hurt, but was prepared to try again. Charles left

the Moshav to give us a chance to work things out, but it was no use. I was terribly unhappy and couldn't live with Nechemia anymore. I decided to separate from him and rather remain alone, than staying with him just for the sake of the children. I felt that if I was miserable, I couldn't be a good mother. Nechemia agreed and moved out, but he came to see the children every day after work. When Charles heard about our separation, he returned, but he moved back into his own house. Now the situation became really bizarre. Nechemia didn't want the children to see Charles, so he asked him to come and see me only after they had gone to sleep. Since the Moshav was such a small place, it wasn't possible to avoid people and they ran into each other all the time. They even had their meals together in the communal dining room, a leftover from the beginning, when the Moshav was run like a Kibbutz. Now it was still used by the few bachelors that lived there, two of them Nechemia and Charles.

This went on for a few months, Charles and I were so happy to be together that we accepted all Nechemia's conditions. He refused to give me a divorce, unless I signed an agreement to hand over the children, when and if he asked for them, which could be any time from now to years in the future. It was an impossible condition which I couldn't accept, so Charles and I resigned ourselves to living together without getting married. In those days it was still frowned upon, but I never cared about convention. Despite Nechemia's objections Charles moved in with me, and now the situation became even more weird. Every evening after work Nechemia came to see the children while Charles was there, and they would often sit together peacefully, have a drink and talk. In all that time we remained friendly with each other, we had no fights, everything was discussed in a civilized manner. Within a short time Nechemia relented and agreed to a divorce, and Charles and I got married on September 3, 1957. The wedding took place at the residence of our local Rabbi in Zichron Ya'acov. To get there we traveled in our Ambulance (a gift from some kind Americans, and since we had not much need for it, it was used for other purposes), accompanied by some of our friends. When we arrived at the Rabbi's house, we found it closed, with a note at the door telling us to wait, as he had to attend a funeral. It was early afternoon and we were in no hurry, so we all went to a cafe and had ice cream. When we returned to the Rabbi's house, the wedding took place without any further obstacles, and we went home to a modest celebration with Sylvia and Philip, our closest friends. I was so happy, I still couldn't believe that everything had worked out so well for me. Charles was the most sought after bachelor, he was very handsome and he had girlfriends galore, and still he fell in love with me. Some people didn't give us more than a few months, they thought they knew Charles and were convinced that he couldn't stay with one woman, but they were wrong.

Charles' family weren't too thrilled with the fact that he was marrying a

woman with three children (Lea had no intention of taking Leora away, it was too convenient for her to leave her with me), but after my new mother in law came to visit and approved of me, I was accepted. She showered us with gifts, she took us shopping and couldn't do enough for me and the children. She was not an easy person to please, but she was always extremely kind and generous to us.

The children adjusted well to the situation, living on the Moshav made it easier, as there were no great changes in their lives. They got used to Charles, they saw their father every day and they had a happy mother. I very much wanted to have another baby, but Charles wasn't keen on it. When I did fall pregnant, he wanted me to have an abortion and I reluctantly agreed. The doctor tried to talk me out of it, but I insisted and made an appointment for the following day. When I came home, very upset and in tears, Charles realized what it meant to me and he agreed with me to keep the baby. I canceled my appointment with the greatest joy, and on March 17, 1960 our son Gil was born, and I don't think anybody could have been happier than his father. Even the doctor who assisted me (the same one who wanted me to keep the baby) was happy.

In the meantime we had acquired new friends, a couple who had arrived from England in 1958. Zelda and Leon came with their two sons to join the Moshav and from the beginning we hit it off. We became inseparable and a lifelong friendship ensued. We looked after each others' children (they were of similar ages) and when Gil was born they were of great help I had my hands full with four children, but Gil was a good baby and we were all delighted with him.

In February 1960 something wonderful occurred. I received a postcard from a stranger in Vienna, telling me that he had just returned from a visit to Russia, he had met a man by the name of Otto Drachsler, who asked him to find out what happened to his family In Vienna. He gave him a list with the names of my mother, my sister and me, as well as those of his parents. The stranger (his name was Renczes) found of course only my name on a list of survivors, and wrote to me, wishing me well, and hoping that I would soon get in touch with my "relative". He didn't know that the man he met was my father. When I read the postcard I got so excited, I almost had my baby there and then, (I was eight months pregnant). I woke up Charles from his afternoon sleep to tell him the news, then I ran to Zelda, and on the way I called out to everybody I met that my father was alive. The children were thrilled to have found a grandfather and wanted to know all about him, but there was nothing I could tell them about his present life. Israel's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were not good at that time and it took two months until I was advised by the Foreign Office that I could write. I was terribly impatient and couldn't wait, but it was important to know that a letter from Israel would not harm him. Finally the day came and I

had a letter in my hand, with the familiar handwriting of my beloved father. He was just as happy to have found me, and sad about the death of all the people he had loved. From then on we wrote to each other frequently, and gradually we told each other our stories.

After working in a camp in Poland he escaped to Russia, where he fell ill with Malaria. A young girl, herself a refugee from Poland, took care of him and nursed him back to health. They lived together in Kiev, where my father studied medicine and finally fulfilled his life's ambition to become a doctor. At some point he and Sofie got married and had two daughters, Lisa and Lena. When my father finished his studies, he was sent first to Mongolia and then to Usbekistan to work. A few years later he and his new family settled in Almalik, a town near Tashkent, where he specialized in Radiology and worked at the local hospital. He had become a fully integrated Russian citizen and was very grateful to that country for giving him a second chance.

I never questioned him about his marrying another woman while my mother was obviously still alive. In war anything goes, and he had no way of knowing our fate. I wonder how he felt when I told him that I was together with my mother till 1944. I didn't hold it against him, I was too happy that he had survived, and that we had found each other. Our greatest wish was to meet once more, but that never materialized. We corresponded regularly, and I cherished every letter. I was not alone anymore, I even had two sisters!

1960, the year Gil was born, held many changes for us. We decided to leave the Moshav and move on. It was not an easy decision, we lived quite a sheltered life there and didn't know what was waiting for us at the outside. Apart from that we had many close friends, and it was hard leaving them. The first thing on the agenda was finding a job, the second a place to live. We were very fortunate in every respect. Charles found out that a new golf course was being built, and he applied for the position of greens keeper. Having worked on the Moshav in most branches of agriculture, he felt qualified for the job. He had played golf in South Africa during all his adult years and was a first class golfer, but it never occurred to him to become a professional. When the job was offered to him, he accepted eagerly, albeit with some trepidation. To prepare himself he read every book on teaching he could lay his hands on, and gradually his confidence grew. He became a great teacher and soon people came from all over the world to take lessons from him.

We had no money when we left, and no property, the house belonged to the Moshav. I had received a one time restitution payment from Germany, which we had spent long ago on essentials. It was quite a bold step to start life on the outside with four children, but there my mother in law was of great help. She even bought us a car. I'll never forget the feeling when Charles brought the car home (at that time we were still on the Moshav). It was a beautiful Opel station wagon and almost new. I had never cared much about possessions, but when

we went for our first drive I felt rich. Having a car wasn't that important to me, it was more of a symbol of how far I had come, after so many years of having nothing. One thing I learned in my life, never to take anything for granted. I have always appreciated everything I have, and I couldn't help thinking how lucky I was. I had a wonderful family, I had found my father and I was looking forward to a fresh start in a new place.

From the beginning everything worked out well. We found a big house for rent in Beth Yanai, a village not far from the golf course in Caesarea. By the time we moved, Charles was already working in his new job and liking it very much. Our house was so big, it took time to get used to, up to now we had lived in two rooms, now we had five. It was built on a cliff overlooking the sea, it was beautiful. For the first two weeks our friends Zelda and Leon, who had left the Moshav at the same time, moved in with us, until their house was ready. It was a bit crowded and noisy with six children, but we had a lot of fun.

Our lives changed considerably from then on. Charles was not only teaching, he was also given the pro–shop to run, and I helped out on weekends. It was a completely different world from the Moshav. Since Caesarea had the only golf course in Israel, it was very popular with the diplomatic corps, and we made many new friends. It didn't take long till we were invited to more cocktail parties and dinners than we could attend. We met ambassadors, political figures and visiting film stars at those parties, which I found fascinating at the beginning, but after a while it palled, I just got bored. Charles felt obligated to go, but I often found excuses to stay home.

My life was full and happy. It was a challenge to move from such a sheltered environment as the Moshav to life on the "outside", but I adapted quickly. The children liked the new school and kindergarten, but more than anything they loved being so close to the beach. It was great in summer, but when our first winter arrived, we were less thrilled. The winds were howling day and night, and although I didn't live in a tent anymore, it reminded me too much of the winter in Cyprus.

Beth Yanai was only a few kilometers away from the next town which happened to be Netanya. We did our shopping there , went to the movies and even visited my uncle Hans and his family occasionally. I got to know Netanya well, I took my driving lessons there and got to know every street. After failing twice I finally passed the third test and I got my license. It was very important for me to drive, especially after we moved away from Beth Yanai. Our lease had run out and we moved to Hadera into our own home, which Charles' mother very generously bought for us. Hadera was a small town very near the golf club, so it was very convenient for us. We had a beautiful garden, the school was right next door and we all settled in very quickly. Now that I could drive, I took Charles to work in the morning and I had the car for the rest of the day. Much later he bought himself a motor bike and I had the car for myself.

How he loved that bike! He kept it in great condition, cleaning and polishing it till it shone, I think if he had to choose between me and the bike, I would have lost. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than racing around the golf course, to the amusement of the members.

The next few years passed uneventfully until Nechemia's death. It happened under strange circumstances. He had married again and lived with his wife on a Kibbutz near Hadera and visited us often. Later he moved to Jerusalem where he became a tourist guide. One day, while our whole family was on a. holiday in Eilath, Nechemia arrived there with a group, and while on a sight seeing trip collapsed and died of a heart attack. He had found out that we were in Eilath as well and had planned to see us after work, but instead we were notified of his death. We went home straight away, we were all very upset and thinking about the strange coincidence of his dying in the same place that we happened to be that very day. He left behind a little girl, Revital, who we only met much later. The children accepted Nechemia's death, they had had very little contact with him lately. Charles had acted as their father for years, and now he could adopt them legally, which he did.

In 1967 the Six Day War broke out. At that time we already owned a TV set although Israel had no TV station yet, but we could watch other Middle Eastern stations and Cyprus. For weeks before the war broke out we saw nothing but tanks, planes and troop movements in Egypt and Syria, but what I found most frightening were the mobs in the streets screaming for our blood. We prepared ourselves for a protracted war by buying extra food, digging a shelter in the garden and waiting with trepidation from newscast to newscast. When the war finally started, and we won on one front after another, we couldn't quite take it in. Everything went so fast, within six days it was all over.

The war was not won without sacrifices, many young soldiers died and many more were wounded. We ended up with more territory than we ever believed possible, suddenly we could visit all the places that had been forbidden to us. Our favorite haunt was the Old City of Jerusalem, we loved strolling through the narrow streets, buying trinkets in the bazaars, but most of all I loved visiting the Western Wall and the other Holy Places of the various religions.

After the war our lives resumed as before and the next few years passed more or less uneventfully as far as our family was concerned. We always had lots of visitors from abroad, Charles had a big family in South Africa and everybody came at least once to Israel. Sometimes our home resembled a hotel, but it was a good education for the children to meet people from other countries.

During all those years I had not forgotten my past, but learned to live with my memories. I rarely spoke of it, but when the children started asking questions, I decided to share my life with them. Gradually, and according to

their ages, I told them about my experiences during that terrible war. I realized that I was putting an enormous burden on them, but I felt that they should know what had happened to me. It did affect their lives, each child in a different way, but on the other hand it brought us closer together. Since the Eichmann trial the subject of the Holocaust was not taboo anymore and survivors began telling their stories, Yad Vashem (the Israeli Holocaust Museum) opened its doors to visitors and suddenly there was an enormous interest in everything connected with it. For me it was a relief to be able to talk freely about my life, it helped me in many ways. When before I could only think of the tragedy that had befallen us, now I began to remember my childhood and the happy times before the war and I could tell the children many stories of my family and of my life in Vienna.

In 1973 I went abroad for the first time, Charles' brother Len and his wife Laura invited me to London. They were wonderful to me and I had a great holiday, we got on extremely well from the start and I enjoyed every moment of my stay with them. I hadn't been away from Israel for twenty four years and seeing England only whetted my appetite for traveling, so when I received an invitation during my stay in London to go to Germany, I accepted. Now I have to go back a few years to the time I became friendly with a German couple, Gisella and Erhard. I had avoided any contact with Germans for many years, at first it was easy, but later tourists started to arrive and a number came to play golf. When Charles told me about this nice couple who came twice a year and wanted to take us out to dinner, I refused to meet them. Charles was very understanding and didn't press me, but one day while going home from the hotel pool where we used to go swimming, we ran into them. I didn't want to be rude, so I accepted their invitation for a cold drink on the terrace. They of course knew a little of my history, but still I felt I had to explain to them the reason why I had avoided meeting them till now, but that I was prepared to make a fresh start. After that we became close friends and whenever they came to Israel we spent many pleasant hours together. Gerhard had invited me often to visit them, but I was not ready to go to Germany at that time.

When Erhard found out about my trip to England, he started calling me there, practically begging me to visit them. He was a very sensitive person and he wanted to make up in small ways for what the Germans had done to me. I finally decided to go, and he sent me first class tickets for the journey from London to Hamburg. The evening before I almost made up my mind not to go, Laura and I had gone to see the movie Cabaret, and when I watched Jews being beaten up I became very upset. But what left the greatest impression on me and really shook me was the scene where a young Nazi gets up and starts singing, slowly everybody rises and joins him, the song swells up, one can feel the excitement of the people, the adulation and their willingness to follow their Fuhrer everywhere. It was too much for me, it reminded me of how it all began.

I was very agitated and couldn't think of going to Germany the next day, but after a restless night I decided not to give in, and I left.

I went by boat to Holland and boarded a train. I was fine until we crossed the border, suddenly Germans in uniform appeared (it was only the passport control), I heard German spoken all around me and everywhere I looked I saw German posters. I started to feel sick, but fortunately a very kind American priest, who shared my compartment, helped me to calm down. I had told him a little about myself and he understood my feelings. By the time we reached Hamburg I was almost back to normal. When the train stopped I saw Gisella and Erhard waiting for me with a big bunch of flowers, they hugged me and seemed so pleased to see me, that I was really glad I came. During the whole week that I was there I was so sheltered that I was hardly conscious of being in Germany. I was being chauffeured everywhere in a big Mercedes, their house was an estate with two swimming pools, one indoors and one in the garden. We went to the best restaurants, the opera and did a lot of sight seeing. Gisella and Erhard couldn't do enough for me, but as much as I enjoyed it, everything felt unreal to me. I couldn't connect the bombed out place that I had seen in 1945, with the beautiful modern city that was spread before me now. I had been afraid being in Germany would bring back memories, but apart from hearing the language again, I could easily forget that I was in Germany. I didn't feel any connection between this fabulous place and the miserable camps that I spent my worst years in. In some way it was a good thing, it helped me overcome my fear of Germany.

Before going back to London I had made plans to go to Vienna for three days. In all the years I couldn't face going back there, but now I felt that I had to overcome this last barrier. My good friend Ricky had decided that I shouldn't be left alone on such a traumatic journey into my past, and came all the way from New York to be with me. When I arrived in Vienna at the railway station, it suddenly hit me. There I stood, all alone, without knowing a single soul, in a city where I had spent my first sixteen years. I had no home to go to, all the people I loved were dead. I felt such sadness and despair, I didn't see or hear the crowd thronging around me, for me Vienna had become a ghost town. All I wanted was to take the next train out and get away from there, but Ricky was waiting at the hotel, so I pulled myself together and went to meet her.

We spent the next three days together visiting all the places of my childhood, I don't think I could have done it without Ricky. I showed her the house we had lived in, my school and the park I played in as a child, and gradually I started to feel better. I could see Vienna again as the beautiful city it was, and as we walked through the familiar streets I remembered the happy times I spent there with my family when I was young. In the end I was glad I went there, when we left Vienna I felt at peace with myself.

Many years later when Czechoslovakia became free of Soviet rule I

traveled to Znaim. My aunt Martha still lived in the same apartment, she was then over ninety, but perfectly fit in body and mind. My cousin Kitty had met me at the airport and from the beginning we felt as if we had never been apart. We talked for hours and cried while looking at pictures of all the family members who weren't with us any more. Kitty and I walked through the streets of Znaim where I had spent all my summers and everything was familiar. I recognized all the places where the four of us, Kitty, Kurt, Evy and I, used to play, argue and fight with each other. From Znaim we went to Prague where Kurt was living. I had never been to Prague, it held no memories for me, so I could just be a tourist and enjoy this beautiful city. It was good to be with my cousins, I was happy that I had been able to see them and my aunt once more. I felt my life had now come full circle and that I had come to terms with the past.

My life with Charles was happy, he was not easy to live with, but I never regretted leaving Nechemia for him. Our love lasted a life time, when he died last month after a long illness, we had been together for forty years. After he became sick he was more concerned about being a burden to me than about his illness. During the last few weeks of his life we had many conversations, he told me again and again how much he loved me and how happy he had been with me. It is a great comfort to me to know that. I miss him, but death came as a relief to him and I am grateful that we had so many good years together.

When I look back at my life, I feel blessed. I went through hard times, but I came out of it reasonably healthy in body and spirit. I have wonderful children and grandchildren, family and friends, I couldn't ask for more. On balance I can only say that my life has been rich and rewarding, I am glad I survived.

January 1998

USHMM LIBRARY
01 0001 0128 8438